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# theatre Australia

THEATRE, FILM, OPERA, DANCE, MUSIC

AUGUST 1981 \$1.95\*

**GRAEME BLUNDELL'S 'SUICIDE' IN MELBOURNE/  
ALTERNATIVES IN JOH'S STATE/OPERA: MORE FEATHERS THAN  
LAS VEGAS!/DANCE: IS THERE A NATIONAL STYLE?/**



**VENETIAN TWINS  
AND KIMROD'S NEW LOOK**

**JUDY DAVIS**

# L U L U



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# Theatre Australia

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*State  
Theatre  
Company*

of South Australia

General Manager: Fred Bea

Sir Robert Menzies had his squirts. Mrs Thatcher has her wets. Mr. Fraser waddy.

What is a squirt? Is it a dash of soda? Is it an act of relief? Does it relate to disease, glandular or intestinal? Is it a dollop of tomato sauce ejected onto a pie in the gutter at Unley Oval? Does it relate to lachrymose little boys and water pistols? Water pressure during a drought?

No. A squirt is a colourless and diminutive politician. Menzies coined the word to describe some of his colleagues, men relatively unblest with the gifts of nature.

In an important sense, many of our free folk's political descendants lack both stature and personality. Menzies thrust in an unguip, personified political nation. His pomposity and servile anglophobia make him a delicious target for satire.

The contemporary political scene cries out for parody and comic analysis. It is dominated by an insidious arrogance redolent of Menzies. It is populated by squirts.

SQUIRTS then is a language as little mirth and big power. It takes pot-shots at the presumed victualisers of power in Australia. SQUIRTS comically bids the squabblers of those who believe they are born to rule.

Political and cultural life in Australia is currently stultified by greed and a callous conservatism. Canberra's feather bed is occupied by Small Government, Big Business and the Media, warped offspring of the woywagger Milton Friedman.

The constitutional assassination of November 1975, as executed by our representative of E.M. Queen Elizabeth II, has successfully depoliticised Australia. There is little debate. Fraser waddy.

Instead we are awash with propaganda from essentially diffident and authoritarian media. While the evangelists of reaction, Murdoch, Parker, Singleton and Leves, spread the primitive gospel of nationalism, the Government is busily selling off the nation.

A new revue  
Directed Neil Armfield  
Design Stephen Carter  
Lighting Design Nigel Lavings  
Choreography Michael Fisher

Australia has never possessed a strong political theatre. Apart from the New Theatre of Sydney and Melbourne, there has only been the Australian Performing Group and more recently the Popular Theatre Troupe of Queensland and Adelaide's Troupe.

Politics is a dirty word in the theatre, despite the diffidence of much political activity. Theatre is Art and dress-ups, the last especially apparent in the 1970s. As Brecht put it, patrons tend to keep up their brains with their coats in the cloak-room.

Critics, frequently mere mouthpieces for the media monopolies, can become quite vain and unkind in the face of left-wing theatre. SQUIRTS, while offering a good night's entertainment, is guaranteed to send some of them right off the planet.

Roughly 90% of the voters in Australia lean to the Left. Roughly 80% of Australian theatregoers lean to the Right. Roughly 70% of plays presented in Australia are non-Australian.

SQUIRTS is all-Australian. Yet it is full of Art and dress-ups. The set, the costumes, the make-up, will delight theatregoers. Patrons of the State Theatre Company will be made to feel at home: experts will be rewarded of the Old Tate Theatre at its best and tours by the Old Vic or Chequer Theatre Company.

SQUIRTS boasts two of Australia's finest comic performers, Max Gillies and Evelyn Kraps, as well as the highly gifted actor-musician, Alan John.

Gillies and Kraps flowered as actors at the APG. They were leading figures in the upsurge of Australian theatre that commenced over a decade ago. Both physically exuberant stylists, they have always shined at a theatre that is rich, relevant and robust, since cutting their teeth on Shakespeare and Chekhov.

The dramatic powers of Gillies have captured parasitoides as diverse as Sir Robert Menzies, B.A. Santamaria and Oscar Wilde. Dramatically he is well known for his performances in DIMBOOLA, THE HILLS FAMILY

SHOW, HENFELLOWS and A STREET-CH OF THE IMAGINATION. He was introduced to State Theatre audiences last year in SCARLAN and SMOKING IS BAD FOR YOU.

Evelyn Kraps, an actress-singer, has worked in theatre, music theatre and opera. She is best known and highly regarded for her performances in DIMBOOLA, THE HILLS FAMILY SHOW, BACK TO BOUNCE STREET, A TOMAT TO MELBA, OFFHEIN IN THE UNDERWORLD and GENTLEMEN ONLY.

SQUIRTS draws upon the talents of a wide range of Australian writers: David Allan, John Clark (Fred Dagg), Patrick Cook, Jack Hubbard, Louis Nowra, Barry Oakley, Tim Robertson, John Sumrell, Phil Scott, Steve Vizard, Don Watson and David Williamson.

Concessions will be available for old Wobblies, Anarchists, veterans of the International Brigade and pioneering feminists.

A surcharge will be applied to Groupers, Gropers and Groupies. Special seats will be laid aside for members of the Lunatic Right, the ANA, the RSL, ASIO, the NF, the NCC, Masons, members of Rotary, Businessmen, the League of Rights, the Festival of Light, WASPS, HAWKS and veterans of the Australian First Movement.

Playhouse  
Adelaide Festival Centre  
Friday 7 August — Saturday 29 August  
and co-ten at the  
Universal Theatre, Melbourne  
from Wednesday 4 September

The STC production is presented in Melbourne by The Almost Managing Company Pty Limited

# COMMENT



## Secundus Rex

For some time the Playbox has been in trouble.

In fact since its conception. The original idea was to occupy a supposed middle ground between the MTC and the Pains Factory but it turned out there was none, or that their programming was wrong.

It seemed that rather than play popular appeal shows, which the MTC did — and often, let's face it, better — or cater material that was too odd, targeted and intermittent to find a following. Even then, there is a schism in 2 for Melbourne audiences with a taste for that kind of thing. John Sumner's theatrical crowd remained secure.

On the other side there was the Pram, though it often had more in the Collective than in the audience — and sketches show that its historical importance, influence and reputation have been far in excess of box office. As has its funding, but then allowances in Melbourne have been much indulged, art agencies seem desperate to find a Melbourne Nimrod.

Hence a theatre being virtually given to the three Hoople company and hence the massive salvage operation last year to extricate it from what would have been a six figure loss. It was not without strings, however, and the condition was that a resident director be appointed. The powers of the only remaining member of the original incarnation, Cateley Gaudier, were to be curtailed.

In the meantime all manner of club and dagger stuff has been going on — including a proposition to ace both Playbox and the Pains and create a new half million dollar second company (which even reached the stage of attempts to lure Paul Lee and Neil Armfield as GM and Director, respectively). But Melbourne would not be Melbourne without such intrigues.

New names have been involved, at least for a year or two, with the appointment of Rex Cramphorn, a director of mature

brilliance an actors' guru who has never had the common touch, an aesthete far removed from the politics of a working company.

Cramphorn is the archetypal director who needs the right to fail. Which is not to suggest that his work artistically lacks, but banality is not a term often used of him.

Perhaps he needs a company again like his legendary Performance Syndicate — but almost 10 years on are such ensembles possible? His actors then accepted a patinae and there was little pressure for product. It takes a Ford Foundation to fund Peter Brook's group explorations.

And the Playbox, palpably needs revivification. Its MTC audience figures are the crux of the problem. But Cramphorn remains extremely above "market pressures", openly declaring that he's "the last person they should get if they want better audiences". With equal candour he speaks of something of a revival of Performance Syndicate — "tough or tenacious working outside the mainstream". He seems enthusiastic about the move to the Victorian capital though, perhaps because it remains the last bastion of his style ferment.

For the future of Australian theatre a good case could be made for funding a Cramphorn company, for the complete figure of the Playbox an actors' ensemble and three Nimrod venues are not gilt-edged initiatives in terms of setting the tide rising.

The Theatre Board policy statement might put "audience growth" (and there is a non-commercial, diversifying intent) a long way down its list after their wish to encourage companies "to achieve excellence", "present works in an exciting and imaginative way" and concern for "new theatrical forms", but harsh financial reality can readily shatter such ideals. If reality continues to fall in real terms, the only solution would be to withdraw entirely from some companies rather than undermine all.

Given such statements, this is probably Playbox's last chance. In Perth the Hole in the Wall, though deprived from notion of complete withdrawal of subsidy, looks set to amalgamate with the state company.

Perhaps the sterility of Cramphorn's work, the depth of his perceptions and the intensity of his approach will win him a following in our alleged intellectual capital. His is a process to test, it should be warned. Melbourne could be tempted by the rather far living him in its midst. Vivat Rex.

## Theatre Australia

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# INFO THEATRE

## TOGETHER AFTER ALL

Robyn News and John Bell were slated to appear together this year in a Nimrod production of *Consciousness*, but due to scheduling and casting problems the production has been postponed until 1982. The two of them will be seen together in Sydney this year, though, in the Sydney Theatre Company's revival of their immensely popular *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

In the original production, John Bell in the title role, played opposite Helen Morse as Roxanne, but Ma Morse is unavailable this year. So Robyn News is stepping into the part, following work on the film *Goodbye Paradise* and one of the ABC drama series *Spring and Fall*.



Robyn News

## NEW FACE FOR PLAYBOX

Ian Cramphorn has been appointed as the New Artistic Director in Melbourne's Playbox Theatre. Although he's dropping Sheppard's *Four Hens* for them at the moment, and is involved in planning next year's seasons, he sees the next few months as transitional and won't settle into Melbourne fully until 1982.

He's looking forward to "having a home for a while, to having a commitment to a company and being able to do developmental work with actors", though whether he will be able to keep actors permanently on salary and to work outside programmed seasons, depends on finances. Cramphorn says he's eager to be going to Melbourne and is excited by the touring and work outside the theatre he sees Playbox moving into next year. His 1982 season is not yet decided, but as this stage looks as though it will be "more structured, with groups of plays rather than simple alternations", and a trilogy of Sam Sheppard's and another of Louis Nizer's look like being something Melbourne can look forward to next year.



Ian Cramphorn — John Fletcher Director

## STC'S CAT

It will be an all star cast in the Drama Theatre for the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof* in September. Richard Wherrett will be directing. Wendy Hughes and John Hargreaves in the lead roles and rehearsals get underway on August 17.



Wendy Hughes

## SWEENEY DEPARTS

The Theatre Board of the Australia Council is temporarily without a Chairman, following the departure of Brian Sweeney. Sweeney's term with the Board ended on June 30 and a replacement has not yet been appointed. He was an actor and vocal leader of the Theatre Board; his parting comment was simply "There's a divinity that shapes our end, rough how them as we may." No doubt he will continue to exert his influence in the arts world from his Brisbane home.



Brian Sweeney, ex-Chairman of the Theatre Board. Photo: Michael Anderson

## ACTORS' WORKSHOPS WITH OGILVIE

For the past month, director George Ogilvie has been enjoying working with bright actors once again, in a series of workshops he initiated and carried out at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust. Since his production of *No Names — No Packaged* at the Sydney Opera House last year, Ogilvie has been working solely on opera and ballet, as he will be for the next six months, and took the chance of a free four weeks to get together with a group of fourteen actors.

One of the most refreshing things about the workshops, he says, is the fact that they are unconcerned to any production so no one is under pressure to produce specific work. The main thrust of them is to find ways in which actors can explore themselves and discover what it is about them that can produce a stage character. Of the fourteen actors, some are experienced in theatre, some in TV, while some have not even been through drama school. If this leads to a production later, it won't be for some time, due to his commitments, and it won't be talked about until the end of the process.



George Ogilvie

## THE MYSTIQUE OF THE MASK

A group exhibition with the title "The Mystique of the Mask" opens at the Gallery Davidink in Hawthorn, Melbourne, on the start of the month. Portraits of some of the cast of *The Dresser* will be on view, as well as those of other theatrical personae, including that of John Gaden, shown on the photo. The artist is Susan Rogers and for her the designs are essentially the perception of the inner person of the subject, in terms of colour, and an expression of the person's attitudes in terms of lines and shapes.



Simon Rogers mask of an actor John Gaudin

## ALIVE AND WELL AND LIVING IN TOOWOOMBA

If you wondered what had happened to director, Mick Rodger, after his production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* for the Sydney Theatre Company last year, and numerous other productions all over the country, he is alive and well and training actors at the Darling Downs Institute of Advanced Education, Toowoomba. Qld DDAE houses the Performance Centre and the Arts Theatre and offers a three-year diploma in the performing arts which Rodger believes can develop the prestige required to put it alongside NIDA and the Victorian College of the Arts.

But what was the attraction of teaching after so successfully free-lancing as a director for the last few years? Mick Rodger feels that working in Toowoomba will give him the opportunity to take stock after an inevitably peripatetic period and give him the chance to catch up on some of his unfinished playwriting. He is currently working with Tim Fitzpatrick, of Sydney University, and a group of Sydney actors on a translation of *The Frobenius* — an early Italian play — and a piece by Dario Fo. He does of course direct his students in productions, and plans to take the 12 or so final year students down to Sydney at the end of the year and erect a showcase in a hired venue.

## MISLEADING ELLIS

The Ellis Column in your June edition was typically misleading. Ellis whinges about the rush of "classics" in *Nimrod* and the other major companies. In fact Aubrey Melville's outstanding production of *Three Sisters* is the only "classic" being staged by *Nimrod* this year.

During 1981 *Nimrod* will produce 14

Australian plays, thus maintaining its record as the most prolific producer of Australian drama, with an average of eight Australian plays a year for the last 11 years.

John Bell,  
Co-Artistic Director,  
*Nimrod*.

## THEATRE BOARD CONCERN

I am writing with some concern regarding the article "The Lone Aroar and No One", page 5, *Theatre Australia*, June 1981.

The Theatre Board of the Australia Council consists of Brian Sweeney (Chairman — until 30 June 1981), Alan Edwards, Malcolm Meers, Tom Logwood, Graeme Murphy, Carol Kaye, Joy Snadden and David Williamson. In making a document last Mike Mullins, the Board (composed mainly of theatre professionals) did so in acknowledgement of the fact that they consider Mike Mullins' work important to the overall development of theatre in Australia, as in its support of the mainstream theatre through general grant companies, specialised programs (including special projects) and the other series of concerts in the Board. These are clearly set out in the Board's policy booklet, and specifically stated in each of the Australia Council's Annual Reports. Copies of both freely available from the Australia Council.

In funding Mike Mullins (and similar projects) the Board is responding to its concerns, not only with the support and maintenance of the present and past of the theatre performing arts, but also with the future. The current grant to Mike Mullins is not only to present the *Lone Aroar* but to develop other projects. It is also one of a

number of grants awarded to Mr Mullins since 1979, and covering such projects as *Shadowless M. Goldsmith's No 2 and No 3*, *Shed a Table for tomorrow*, (co-funded with the Music Board), most of which have been critically acclaimed and well received by those interested in such work.

At no time did your correspondent approach me or other staff to get a Theatre Board view. Surely such an approach is basic to ensure balanced and responsible journalism. Your correspondent hopes that the Australia Council will at some stage give an indication of what the public have to gain from what could be seen as simply a series of isolated "happenings". I do not think that either Mr Mullins or the Board would view his work as "outdated happenings". As to what the public will gain remains to be seen and judgement will be best left until after Mr Mullins' work has been seen for the remainder of this year, next year and beyond. What the Board is concerned about is that audiences should develop in new areas and for new art forms. Such gains are not easily won, the "results" may not be seen for a long time, but nevertheless the Board sees the support of this development as a natural part of its brief, especially if it be an experimental innovative theatre, modern dance, young people's theatre, community theatre and other such categories (and in one or two of which, notably modern dance, advances have been made).

Your correspondent also considers the \$10,000 grant for Mr Mullins "a substantial amount in view of the limited funds available to, and financial difficulties of many theatre companies in 1981". Again, when the financial constraints of limited money, the Board attempts to support many different kinds of activities, across all the theatre arts forms that are its responsibility and meeting State and local needs. The Board has not yet visited the stage as set out in its review "Support For Professional Drama Companies" that "if subsidy continues to fall in real terms, the only solution would be to reduce subsidy from some companies rather than undermine all", though the time for this may be imminent. Many grants are given that could be seen as "substantial" especially considering the situation of many theatre companies. (Would your correspondent consider the \$25,000 granted to *Theatre Australia* for this year in this category? However, the Board gives very careful consideration to the many applications it receives, its stated policy and its wish to ensure a balanced development of theatre in Australia and make its decisions responsibly and accordingly.

Yours sincerely,  
Michael FitzGerald,  
Director,  
Theatre Board

The five Tony awards — best play, best actor, best direction, best set and best lighting — were recently in America by Peter Shaffer's *Absolutely* raised hopes that we might at long last see this interesting-sounding play. Now the whisper — the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, which holds the Australian rights, intends letting them go to the Melbourne Theatre Company if the production then takes off. The trust will consider a national tour.

The Trust has good reason to be cautious. Following the loss of a reported \$150,000 on David Williamson's *Catfish*, *Heroes* it was looking at another, though very much smaller, deficit from the disappointing tour of Brian Clark's *Whore Life Is It, Am I not?* Final figures are not available at the time of writing, but the Adelaide and Perth seasons had to be cancelled, though the Melbourne season was extended to take advantage of the building boom office there. The final week there, as in Sydney, was close to break-even. The Queensland tour was in jeopardy until a sell-out

# SHOW BUZZ

by Norman Kennell

investment. This left the producers with \$26,2% plus hopes for additional income from stock and amateur royalties.

By the time you read this attractive Sydney singer-dancer-actress, Kathryn O'Neill, who took over from the happy program *Melanie Mays*, will be leaving the end of her stint as the ultimate Elvis and ready to replace US star Pam LaPore, whose three-months engagement ends this month. Gape McFarlane then becomes the third of the ultra-rare Elvises, not counting, unfortunately, Carolyn Carlson, who also played the role a few times. Ward is that both new girls are more than able to handle the role but as one performing member of the company put it so me, it's going

circus named *Beth Henley's Painter* Post-winning *Crimes of the Heart* best American play. *Alice* opens in Adelaide on August 13, followed by Melbourne, Hobart and Canberra. Then there's a beautiful comes to Sydney next February.

Remember the last production by Sydney's short-lived *Mercury Theatre*, Heinrich von Kleist's *The Broken Pinner*, starring Peter Fawcett. This 1808 comedy had just been used for an off-Broadway revival.

Melbourne's *Playbox Theatre*'s second 1981 season got off to a good start with the production of *Stoppard's Every Good Boy Deserves a Partner* — presented in conjunction with the Victorian Arts Centre. Director was George Fawcett.



Peter Shaffer — his first success for Australia



David Williamson — *Melanie Mays* and *Catfish* have been



Robert Culp — *Whore Life Is It, Am I not?*

Arthur in Australia. At the Playbox Theatre, comes another production this month of two short plays by Rusty Dickins and set another in October with *Chen Gorman's* *Eight to the Arms of Rachel*, which was workshopped at the Playwrights Conference.

Adding playwrights who need lots of characters to get their message across, now's your chance. For up full-length play current to celebrate its 50th anniversary next year, Sydney's New Theatre points out that as it is non-professional, opportunities exist to write for large casts. Prizes are \$1000 and \$500 plus a royalty of 10 percent of gross takings if plays are staged, which the theatre agrees for 12 months the right to do. Closes close Jan 18, 1982. Send stamped self-addressed envelope to New Theatre Play Competition, PO Box 337, Kensington NSW 2033, for details.

Not missing British comedian Jimmy Jewel at a select welcome party attended by a host of local fellow-comics: Johnny Lockwood, Johnny Farr, Bobby Lamb, Mike



agreement was reached with the risks being carried by the aggressive theatre management in Townsville, Rockhampton and Brisbane, where the tour ends on August 15.

Disney over the poor response to *Whore Life* should be surprised by knowledge that the Broadway run of 225 performances with Tom Conti and 96 with Mary Tyler Moore lost money, to the tune of \$134,023. The national tour also lost \$134,023, but the overall deficit was offset by sale of the film rights for \$154,000. Backers of the \$450,000 production got back only 65 percent of their

so to uphill marketing the local talent after the hard-core campaign with LaPore. So its English ceased for the show to make the hoped-for distance over the Christmas season. Incidentally I hear lead dancer Kevin Johnston has left the show to return home to Perth.

A *Lesson From Alice*, the new Arthur Fugard play in which the husband and wife team of Oliver Moffitt and Tony Whelan, imminent exponents here of Fugard's work, will star for the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, has been voted best play of 1980-81 season by the New York Drama Critics Circle. The

Musical Director, John Hopkins and the 50-piece symphony orchestra from the Victorian College of the Arts. At the same time the Playbox Theatre staff saw their production of SA playwright, Geraint Clark's latest play *Force of Attraction* directed by former SA State Theatre Company Artistic Director, Kevin Palmer. Next up they have the Australian premiere of Sam Shepard's latest *True West* which Rex Crumpton will direct and following that they go into co-production with the Marjorie Theatre on Roger Peltier's puppet play *Grass*. Mac-

Harris, the late Ben-Weathers will remember Jewel in the series *Force of Attraction*, screened earlier this year by the ABC and in which he played by own father. He told me a follow-up series is planned in which he'll play himself. He was here to visit his son and family and to do some talkback modern New Zealand. He was reported later as saying he'd like to appear here in his West End success, Neil Simon's *The American*. (So I wouldn't put money in that, even if he could find a backer or a theatre. Both play and film have done the rounds here with only moderate success.)



# SPOTLIGHT

## BLUNDELL "SUICIDES" IN MELBOURNE

by Shelley Noller

Most thinking actors try to minimise their professional compromises. Graeme Blundell, having done his share of "really reprehensible roles", is pleased to tackle the part of Semyon in the Melbourne Theatre Company's production of *The Suicide* this month.

Despite its title, the play, by Nikita Erdman, is a great satirical farce which emerged from the bizarre restrictions of Stalin's Russia. Erdman uses farce as a way of exhibiting the madness of a society in which "only the dead say what the living may think."

It is the late 1920's and Semyon's financial situation is hopeless, so he decides to commit suicide — or rather, the idea is accidentally forced upon him. Suddenly, he is besieged by spokesmen of several action groups urging him to use his death to promote their cause. Semyon's suicide would offer a splendid opportunity for a manifesto in the form of a suicide note.

As the little man's courage grows with his new importance, the rameness of a bureaucracy can not be paralleled by the outrageousness of the farces which want to use him.

*The Suicide* was recognised as a comic masterpiece by Erdman's contemporaries — Gorki, Stanislavsky, and Meyerhold. And in retrospect, it is something of a miracle that the play progressed as far as rehearsal. It was banned before the opening and never performed nor published in the Soviet Union.

Blundell sees Semyon as "a Walter Mitty figure with touches of Hamlet when it comes to making decisions."

"*The Suicide* is much more serious than a farce — if that is not a contradiction!" Blundell says. "In those times, to kill yourself was quite a realistic thing. The revolution was over and people were worse off than



ever. The tragic dimension is quite hard to fathom for someone who has never been to Russia. It is not an easy play to research."

To delve into the politics and social conditions of that period, Blundell has engaged the expert help of a friend, Roger Pulvers, whom he describes also as an authority on European history, a playwright, director, translator and novelist.

As for his interpretation of Semyon, he says "That is an open book. It starts off as an amorphous thing. I've done this as a director. You toss a few ideas around and see how it works."

This sounded more elusive than Stoppard and behind the sophisticated professionalism Blundell brings to his work.

When I asked him about his own political positions and their potential influence on his portrayal of Semyon, he gave me a long-winded reply which began with "The Soviet's political credentials are incredible —

and trailed off into irrelevance.

"But you haven't answered the question."

"No, I haven't," he replied with a cheeky smile, "and I don't think I will."

Blundell has not worked on stage (with the exception of acting in two plays at this year's National Playwrights' Conference in Canberra) since he played in Tom Stoppard's *Jingo Good Run Dearies Favour*.

at the Adelaide Festival last year. Ironically this play, also dealt with the plight of Russian dissidents ("But *The Suicide* is not nearly as verbally dexterous as Stoppard's play. It is more a situation comedy."

After living in Sydney for a year "doing bits and pieces (television: two plays in the ABC's Spring and Fall series *The Expert* and *Going Home* and film: *Doctors* and *Women* and *The Best of Friends*), Blundell is looking forward to working in Melbourne theatre again.

"Television has a gross appetite that devours people very quickly and spits them out," he says. "Yet I loved working on *Home Under The Bridge*. And I love the *Cop Shop* shows — the short cuts, the instant rapport and camaraderie among the actors."

He also says that despite being "merchandised and marketed like a soap powder" in his *Alvin Purple* days

"it was an aberration, a poliober, I needed the money and it seemed harmless." He has always been secure about his standing in the theatre.

"I've worked in most of the companies in the country. I've always been involved in theater work. From *Factory*, La Mama and *Hoppla*. Ironically, it was through my *Alvin* roles that I received invitations to politicians' homes for dinner."

Which makes you wonder what kind of dinner invitations he'll receive after *The Suicide* opens. ...

# SPOTLIGHT

## Puppet's home—with



MTA Artistic Director, Richard Bradshaw

It has taken the Marionette Theatre of Australia four years to find a home, a place where one small company could combine its administration, workshops, rehearsals and performances, and not even on a full-size human scale. Puppets like Albert the Magic Pudding, Captain Lazar, Harry the Hippo and Morton Barman have been a long time looking for somewhere to rest their strings.

In fact it was Artistic Director, Richard Bradshaw and co-Administrator, Susan Thomson, who went through most of the searching process, and finally reaped the reward of finding the perfect building for their requirements. They actually checked out the old Sailors' Home in the Rocks area of Sydney some three years ago, but it took until December last year for the Sydney Cove Redevelopment Authority to decide how to dispose of the building.

They could hardly have found a more appropriate use for the space: the open, central area, surrounded by three galleries of cells (accommodation provided for the sailors was pitiful) will make an ideal performing space for puppet productions, though nowhere near big enough to accommodate stage, backstage or wing space

for full-sized theatre. Likewise, the basement area will make excellent puppet workshops, and upstairs will accommodate rehearsal space alongside offices. Other home-hunting theatre companies inspected the Sailors' Home, but found it inappropriate — mainly in terms of size — for their requirements.

As soon as the Marionette Theatre's lease was finalised at the end of last year they moved straight in, even in its unconverted state — with no heating and few amenities the building provided better accommodation than their previous quarters. Their administration was operating out of two particularly grotty back offices at the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, the workshop they had once occupied there had been taken over by the Sydney Theatre Company, so that had been transferred to the bowels of the Sydney Dance Company building, and they had no performing space of their own — having to resort to booking the Opera House Drama Theatre for major school holiday productions when possible — nor any central place for the full company even to meet.

Although the Sailors' Home is potentially the ideal home for the Marionette Theatre, that potential is still half a million dollars away from being realised. Their current task — along with continuing regular work — is to raise money needed for conversion, on the basis of a dollar subsidy for dollar raised capital grant from the State Government. Work will start when they get to about \$100,000, hopefully by the end of the year. A professional fund-raiser is on staff for five months (fund-raisers do not work who had just stepped in to look around with his wife and family, was so impressed by the puppet exhibition that he offered all timber needed for the conversion completely free of charge, and similar offers had been made on staining for the theatre, electrical work and glass. Cash, though, is needed too, and as soon as enough is raised work will begin — plans and estimates are completed and all that is needed is the word to go. Of



The central area of the Sailors' Home which will be for

course, should the fund-raising take much longer than expected, costs may rise.

The Sailors' Home is solid sandstone, a wonderful old building, and MTA will not need to make any structural alterations. Built in the 1860's it was the first Sailors' Home in Sydney and became an early landmark of the city. A first fund-raising campaign for the building itself was launched by Prince Albert, Duke of Edinburgh, on his tour to Australia, the central event was an inaugural picnic at which an association on a percentage basis, as is commonly believed — to protect themselves from failure and their employers from success) and things were looking optimistic after a fund-raising gathering mid-year. If the cash was not exactly flowing in, donations in kind were forthcoming: a timber merchant, attempt was made on the Duke by a madman, which failed and he was shot in the backside (the subject of Dick Hall's play, *The Duke of Edinburgh Assassinated*). Nothing quite so momentous has occurred during the recent fund-raising efforts.

The major amount of work will go

# no strings attached



view into the Marquette Theatre's performing space

into the new theatre, planned to seat 170 and designed especially for children, but which adults can also use. It will be able to accommodate totally flexible staging — middle and end — and can be raised and lowered to be used for anything from rod puppetry to late-night cabaret. All seating will be custom built, there will be space for flying scenery, complex electronics and altogether it will become what Administrator, Philip Reife, describes as "a very technical space". Having their own theatre will also allow MTA to outperform other Australian and international puppet companies, something they are always receiving requests about, but have not been able to do so far.

In the meantime they press on with the immediate work in hand. Throughout the year three separate companies each with different productions, play to between 500 and 600 schools around the country and

their last school holiday show was the popular revival of *The Magic Pudding*. Following last year's *Captain Lazar*, two more adult shows are planned, again with the designs of cartoonist Patrick Cook: with the *Playbox*, a Melbourne season of Roger Pulvers' puppet play, *General McArthur in Australia*, and hopefully in October, at the Stables in Sydney, a production called *Mephalomantis*, with comedian Geoff Kelso, will be scheduled.



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# SPOTLIGHT Off on a tangent

Queensland's state company goes alternative

by Jeremy Ridgman

With one of the largest subscription lists in the country and record attendances this season, the Queensland Theatre Company are riding the crest of a wave, it is on that even they are launching their first "alternative" season, three productions in the Community Arts Centre's Edward Street Theatre, under the banner Tangent Productions. Two years ago, the company had an unexpected hit with *Clothesmakeovers*, a brilliant exploration of physical comedy, improvised on a shooting by a handful of otherwise temporarily redundant actors: Tangent Productions, however, represents the first attempt to create a full season and whilst the trio of plays have little in common other than their Australian origin, the QTC's Artistic Director, Alan Edwards, maintains that if the project is a success, a more thematically coherent programme might be considered for next year.

One might, with some justification, question the choice of a new play by an unknown writer (Stuart Dickinson's *A Season at Ciprovitz*) as the inaugural production. It is neither a crowd-puller nor a particularly challenging piece in the ways that David Allen's *Upside Down at the Bottom of the World* and *New Sky*, a one woman show by mime specialist Judith Anderson, might be considered. What, in fact, does the much bandied term *alternative* mean?

Although associate director Peter Duncan has been appointed co-ordinator of the season, the venture is the brain-child of Alan Edwards himself and has apparently been gestating for the past three years. Edwards' aim is to check the tendency towards "artistic and administrative atrophy" that comes with consolidated success by providing an opportunity for actors and younger, inexperienced directors to develop their talents through experiment and risk-taking.



Tangent director Peter Duncan

The QTC, he believes, has ceased to function, as it did in its early years, as a training ground: the higher standards and achievements become, the greater the temptation to take safe bets in casting and programming.

It is perhaps understandable that Edwards should be concerned not to step over into the territory, already frequently dubbed "alternative", a present manned by La Bete and TN Dancer John Minton, however, TN

announced a short-lived "underground" season, comprising plays by the likes of Brecht, Moliere and Heathcote Williams: at the moment there is no such "alternative", "rough", "dangerous", "counter-cultural" theatre, call it what you will, in Brisbane. One does not expect minority appeal theatre for the sake of it, of course. What one hopes for is a thought-out policy, perhaps best summed up for this writer by Colin Chambers' (*Other Spaces*) assessment of the RSC's *Other Place* productions, "an appropriate method of communication — acting, directing, design — conceived in terms of the closeness and scrutiny of the audience (which implied an act of faith in the social value of truth and knowledge, in the sharing of both)".

With the Edward Street Theatre and the Current Box (conveniently situated on the University campus) now fully established, and given the possibility for artistic policy, one can hope that the way is open for such an enlightened philosophy of "alternative theatre" being realised in Brisbane.



*Clothesmakeovers* — the QTC's first "alternative" production

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# nimrod

by Lucy Wagner

Since the break up of the original artistic triumvirate in 1980, with Richard Wherrett picked to lead the Sydney Theatre Company and Ken Horler's later departure, Nimrod appears to have been floundering. Even though it could be argued that it was John Bell's classical and Australian productions that largely encapsulated what has become recognisable as the 'Nimrod style', he alone, without the administrative abilities of Horler and the precision, richness and coherence of Wherrett's productions, did not seem able to sustain Nimrod's leading role among theatre companies.

New brooms and clean sweeps were initiated, a gamble on the youthful and inexperienced Neil Arnfield seems overall to have paid off, the idea of a designer as co-artistic director, judging by its short-livelihood, did not. Coincidental with Bruce Patlack's replacement of Paul lies as administrator, rumours of politics and attempted coups proliferated and the advent of the Women and Theatre 'limited life' project within the Nimrod portfolio did nothing to quiet them. By May this year, discussions at the Playwrights' Conference openly referred to clashes between groups of differing political and sexual preferences within the company matters seemed to be reaching a head.



Tornell is the company culminated in a motion being carried at Board level that the decision of the Artistic Directors was final, and Board member, David Williamson, still bruised from his Melbourne experiences and shy of confrontations, had

to be persuaded not to resign in the face of controversy.

Whatever differences there were, though, it seems that steps have been taken to avert a crisis, re-establish company coherence and assert the joint and unified leadership of the Artistic Directors. Possibly Aubrey Mellor, the most recent addition, has provided a bridge between the theatricalism of Bell and the more politically motivated Arnfield. Certainly in a round table discussion between the Directors, members of the new permanent acting company and Chris Woodward of Women and Theatre, everything, at least on the surface, gave the impression of a united company, strong working relationships and an optimism and certainty about Nimrod's current strengths and aims.

The way in which the new season was chosen is evidence of the continuing policy of democracy in the company, but with ultimate responsibility lying with the Artistic Directors. At a number of company meetings attitudes were expressed and concerns aired which were taken into consideration over the choice of plays. More specifically the whole company then read and discussed a number of plays and selected a majority consensus. This was passed on to Bell, Arnfield and Mellor who made their own directional choices in the context of a balanced season. Arnfield was quick to point out that it wasn't simply an 'selected season' and Bell that 'there wasn't a narrow set of rules or restrictions on the choice of play, but they reflect a wide number of concerns and individuals'.

The new permanent acting company is stressed, too, as a major factor in the choice of plays, the season giving equal opportunities for all between the Upstairs and Downstairs theatres. Ideally the ensemble comprises four men and four women in permanent

employ, with larger casts or other role requirements being filled by short-term engagements. Part of the company has been on staff since early in the year, but its current strength is still only four women — Michele Fawdon, Anna Voska, Cathy Downes and Deirdre Rubenstein — and two men — Barry Otto and John Walton. This is claimed to be due to the greater amount of work available for male actors and so a greater unwillingness by men to commit themselves to a single job for one year.



Even without this problem the cast requirements of most plays, classic and contemporary, lean in favour of men, yet it is not seen as unrealistic to have an equally divided ensemble. It is rather a conscious decision aimed at righting the current inequality and an important factor in deciding what plays are produced. *Coriolanus* (to star John Bell and Robyn Nevin) was at one stage to be included in the new season, but along with Mellor feeling he hadn't sufficient time to prepare for it, the lack of good female roles led to its postponement.

Although in the very early days Nimrod had a core group of four actors, they have for many years cast their seasons for specific requirements and have created an identity as a theatre company without needing to employ a permanent acting company. Bell explained that it was a long desired development and that the philosophy behind it was 'the opposite to the old concept of opera, where a production exists, virtually independent of anyone, it's put on year after year and the prima donna flies in with her own costume and make-up and steps into the role, the chorus arrives

# NEW COMPANY NEW SEASON NEW CERTAINTY

and are told their steps and gestures, and the whole thing's dead from the ankles up".

Michelle Fawcett commented herself to a year at Nimrod because "I wanted to work within a situation where I felt happy, with a group of professionals I respected, and I wanted to break away from certain type-casting". Nimrod was a particular choice for its mode of theatre, the energy it generates and the broad spectrum of communication, within the company and to audiences, whereas "I think there's something very intimidating about the Sydney Theatre Company".

She is particularly excited by a company devised show which will probably be scheduled for performance next year. Aubrey Mellor and Neil Armfield have sat in on a few seasons so far and Mellor commented that "the work they're doing in front of each other is very brave and it will help them in other plays". Barry Otto agrees that it is elements like this that make being part of an ensemble an entirely different proposition to being hired for two or even three shows in a row. "It is the opportunity to relax into a job, to be able to expand without looking to the next prospect all the time and to have the time to learn to trust your fellow actors."

If the role of the acting company is one of expanding artistic potential, where then does the Women and Theatre project fit in to Nimrod? Nowhere, they all insisted: Nimrod simply houses the administration of the project, a very congenial arrangement because their general aims are similar and each benefits from cross-fertilisation with the other.

"There has been talk," said Chris Westwood, WAT co-ordinator, "of Nimrod looking to the Women's project's hundred thousand dollar grant to supplement its own income, and of a Marxist feminist media trying to take over Nimrod, but there's no

possibility of either." The Directors agree that their vision has been expanded by the presence of WAT, to the extent of scheduling Alison Lysia's play, *Pinball, Downstairs*, following its debut at the WAT play-readings in February, and appointing Chris Johnson as trustee director when they would otherwise probably have looked for a man.

Despite the raised level of social and sexual consciousness that seems to inform the current season and planning, it might still be true to say that Nimrod has undergone an identity crisis over the last 18 months, particularly in regard to the Sydney Theatre Company. Now, though, the company seems to have worked through this to a stronger sense of assurance than ever in its past and future. John Bell's comparison of *Peppermint Trees* and *Changeling* (see) exemplifies this, and the general commitment to Australian writers is one of the major policy tenets.



Nimrod will have produced 11 Australian plays this year; six out of the new season's eight plays are Australian and that brings their annual average to eight Australian plays over the last 11 years.

In terms of general social commitment none of the Artistic Directors would be drawn to say more than that their choice of plays was strongly affected by their relevance to current concerns and that that applied to the classics as much as to new plays. The feeling towards the Sydney Theatre Company seemed to be one of reasonably friendly rivalry and one which found comparisons were no longer relevant to the Nimrod's recaptured certainty of direction. The

odium of comparison was not entirely absent, though, from Chris Westwood's summarising remark that the bar of Nimrod should be a place, not where audiences loitered to exchange raptures on the set and costumes, but where people stayed to the early hours discussing the ideas raised by the production they had just witnessed.

## JOHN BELL: "The Venetian Twins", "Last Day In Woolloomooloo"

"It's interesting that Venetian Twins will be competing with Chicago — and literally so in Melbourne, where they're at the Comedy and we're across the road at Her Majesty's — though they've got a 10 week season to our three weeks. The point is that Chicago is a very glossy, very thorough, professional American musical and ours is much more ramshackle, knockabout and anti-professional in a sense, and it reflects our policy in that it takes a classic and knocks spots



off it and makes it totally Australian and popular in the broadest sense. It's just interesting that those two will be seen together. It reflects a lot of what we've been doing over the years. Now it's in rehearsal we've been changing and adapting and the actors are more and more taking over the show. It's the kind of work that even though it's frivolous on the surface and a trivial piece, it's serious in another sense and in that it's breaking all the rules of theatre and getting through to an audience.

"*Last Day in Woodroom* is the least satisfactory in terms of using the company because there are no parts the resident actors can really do. It's a play we selected some time ago and it now needs workshopping and re-writing to some extent to bring it a little more up to date with the issues. On one level it's a black comedy concerned with what's happening to certain areas of Sydney that are being taken over, demolished and redeveloped. On the other hand in a more metaphorical way it's about people having half-lives; all the residents are being moved out and destroyed because they're not living in the real world, their hopes are pinned on memories of the lost war or winning the lottery or old lovers. They're the losers and the pragmatists are going to destroy them and dig up their territory."

# **AUBREY MELLOR:** **"Cloud Nine", "Tales from the Vienna Woods"**

"The great thing to start with about *Cloud Nine* is its four men and four women — the numbers of the resident company. It's also a very funny play, and nice for me to do a comedy after the heavies (*Three Sisters* and *Protest!*). It's got something to say and it says it in a very entertaining way; there are marvellous chances for actors with the sexual role-swapping. Though it's another English play, which is unfortunate following

*Teeth & Smiles*, it's the start of a new season and within the balance of that, is good. The more one looks at it the better it actually is, the remarkable thing is that it's been revised three times.



"Both that and *Tales from the Vienna Woods* were very popular with the company — people wanted to be involved with them and to act in them. It's nice to do an epic in the season somewhere and it's nice to try the challenge of staging such a piece in our theatre — we have to find a way of cutting down on the cast and concentrating on the issues. It's a very black piece and I always like to see a ray of hope somewhere, but it's so black that I think it'll have a very positive effect on the audience, perhaps to try and watch out for the signs that were happening then, in Germany in the thirties. It's all the bourgeois and self-seeking, self-centred people in desperate search of happiness in an age of inflation with mounting pressures and time speeding on. There are many parallels."

# **NEIL ARMFIELD:** **"Welcome the Bright World", "Eyes of the Whites"**

"*Welcome the Bright World* isn't cast yet, Stephen Sewell is still working on the second draft

The first draft was extremely exciting, with Stephen's usual mixture of wonderful dialogue which seems to reach out and touch on an enormous breadth of understanding and interest. It's set in Germany, although, like *Treitors*, it's an Australian language play and just as much about Australia as Germany. He's deliberately chosen a Western style democratic society, fairly highly industrialised, and it seemed to be best placed in Germany. It's concerned with a scientist who, having worked for the Government and been in a highly responsible position socially, finds that his daughter is a terrorist, and his crisis of conscience about the kind of society he's working for. It's about the way science is being used more and more by society to make the world what it is, and individuals making a response to this.

"*Eyes of the Whites* is by Tony Strochan, who lived in New Guinea for a lot of his childhood, and a lot of it's drawn from his personal experience in the 60's. It's about the clash of the native New Guinea culture with foreign, imperialist cultures coming in — particularly Australian. The country and the culture are being changed by white rule and it's about how a culture can survive and work towards independence in the face of technology."





# 25 YEARS ON - A TURBULENT ANNIVERSARY IN THE WEST

Director, Stephen Barry talks to Mardy Amos about the National Theatre, Perth, currently celebrating its quarter century.

When the Playhouse first welcomed Perth theatre-goers in August, 1936 it was the concrete fulfilment of the dreams of all the dedicated enthusiasts who had been involved with live theatre since the formation of the Perth Repertory Club in 1919 and little difficulty was envisaged, in those pre-television days, in keeping its 700 seats warm. Sadly, those halcyon days are gone, theatre, like just about everything, is going through "difficult" times and the National Theatre Company as the Playhouse is no exception — and faces the problem of how to get the vital "burns in seats" (now trained down to 512) and keep them coming back.

In this year in which it celebrates its 25th anniversary, the NTC has implemented a change of policy which has caused rumblings of opposition, particularly amongst the theatrical community. This is nothing new to Stephen Barry, for the same rumblings occurred when he arrived in Perth just over three years ago to take up his position as Artistic Director (having held a similar position at the Harrogate Theatre in England) mainly on the grounds that he wasn't a "local product" and therefore knew nothing about Australian theatre. Barry, an urbane but positive man in his mid-thirties, cheerfully admits this.

"I knew a bit about the Playhouse, but couldn't prejudge Australian audiences. I just had to learn."

And did he?

"When I came here we had a marketing problem, subscribers were down to 300 and they are the most powerful selling factor for a loyal subscriber audience helps when word of mouth is bad. Now we vary between 2,600 and 2,600."

Had Barry perhaps played it too carefully, in the artistic sense, when he came here, catering for the "blue-rose"

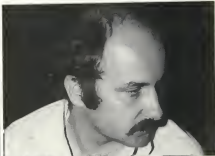


Photo: Ian, Stephen Barry

set" who had melted away under his predecessor, Aarne Nornes, who had not provided a menu bland enough for their palates. Why, for instance, had the tiny upstairs Greenroom (originated to provide "alternative" theatre) closed down?

"Simple economics. As productions got bigger in the downstairs theatre, there wasn't enough money to go around and with only fifty seats they had similar problems to the Hole in the Wall, even with a full house it didn't pay enough. When the Hole had to go fully professional with its subsidy and pay full Equity rates, it meant that the demands on any director were enormous. If the Playhouse amalgamated with the Hole, it would preserve its availability for all "alternative" work and take the financial pressure off. I'm totally in favour of such a merger."

(The Hole in the Wall Theatre Perth's other subsidised company currently under the direction of Edgar Metcalf — has always provided healthy competition for the Playhouse, though somewhat limited in its choice of plays by its size, but it also has to woo an audience.)

What has changed the face of Perth theatre dramatically (many would see

it as being "killed") is the advent of local entrepreneurs Mason-Miller, who have had success with recent revivals of *The Importance of Being Earnest* and *Coward's Cider with Rosie* under the direction of Raymond Omside. There is also the fact that two more theatres have become available for "commercial" productions. His Majesty's, restored from its decaying Edwardian grandeur to comfortable opulence, and The Regal, an old movie theatre in the inner-city suburb of Subiaco.

How does Stephen Barry regard this nibbling away of his potential audience and what could be called an altered atmosphere of acceptance for the Playhouse?

"I've been greatly interested in the number of companies that have come into Perth. There's always value in novelty and I guess we are regarded as part of 'The Establishment'. But I don't see the theatre-going public increasing all that quickly, which means they are being spread more thinly with the advent of new companies and we are all pushing for our share."

In that case, what is the solution, if any?

"I wonder," says Barry thoughtfully, "if we (The Playhouse) are not doing too much work. We're based on the English system, which started out as weekly repertory, then monthly. But now a number of companies in England have moved away into doing less work, but having bigger productions. They run for a four-week season and then entered if the demand is there, balancing out the big productions — Brecht, Shakespeare, Sheridan — with monthly gaps in between, so that each more time the company has a chance to catch its breath. Take our case for instance — in its last week *The Elephant Man* was doing good business, but we couldn't extend because *On Our Selection* was crowding on its heels."

On May 21, the opening night of Bernard Pomerance's *The Elephant Man*, Stephen Barry ceased to be Artistic Director of The National Theatre Company. Instead he assumed the title of Director and with it overall responsibility for all the Company's workings, until his extended contract expires at the end of 1982, the above-mentioned change of policy which has caused the rumblings which take the form of questioning exactly what he will do.

Apart from assuming overall executive and administrative responsibility (although there is already a General Administrator, John Toussaint) there is no doubt that one of Barry's tasks will be to operate as a "money man" encouraging further financial support from the private sector. He has already achieved a good track record in this field from organisations such as the Perth Building Society, Shell Company of Australia and other commercial enterprises and will now be able to concentrate more in this area. How else will this change benefit the Company?

"Over the next period I will introduce a number of artistic directors to work with the company — they will not all be of the one stamp, but varied. I've always thought that there has never been enough exchange of directors and as they come from other States to work here, it will also increase the possibility of an interchange of actors."

The system has already started with John Mibson directing *On Our Selection* and Edgar Metcalfe with Priestley's *When We Are Married*.

David Addenbrooke will direct Shaw's *Pymonion* which will mark the Anniversary celebrations and the beginning of the new subscription season, then comes Metcalfe again with Alan Ayckbourn's latest, *Surrey's Perhaps* then John Preston (Director of the Company's flourishing Theatre in Education) with Dorothy Hewett's children's play *Golden Pollen*.

"The pattern won't really become clear until next year as we changed in the middle of this year. I'll choose the directors, and the final casting decisions rest with them, although I will make recommendations. But the back definitely stops at me. I'd also like to see actors, directors and playwrights have a bigger hand in what we're doing, perhaps form a "repertory committee" to look at programme concepts and ideas. State Drama Companies tend to become monoliths — actors should always be available to everybody concerned."

Will he be doing any directing himself from now on?

"Yes, but as a guest director in the same way as the others. I'll probably work with Edgar (Metcalfe) on *Surrey's Perhaps* as that consists of two

plays running on alternate nights which will be an enormous work-load for him, but it will be his overall baby. Then I'll be directing our Christmas musical, which is becoming a bit of a tradition, and people liked *Oliver* last year. This year it will be *Jesus* with Jill Perryman as Miss Harman and Edgar Metcalfe as Daddy Warbucks — he's going to shave his head, but we haven't cast the lead yet or the dog! That will be at The May."

Where then does he see the National Theatre Company going when it leaves The Playhouse?

"Well, it will be ten years, I think before the State Drama Company is housed in the proposed Cultural Centre (a new complex to be constructed on the North side of Perth which has been begun with the new WA Art Gallery). They (the State Government) have missed their chance now because of dramatically rising costs. Here's the theatre (he grabs a thick roll of plans from the corner beside his desk and waves them) but it's been shelved for eight years and I think it will be ten. Things could change with any changes of Government, but the present one has already spent \$12 to \$14 million on The May and they sink about \$6 million into the Entertainment Centre a few years back."

Looking around his cramped and cluttered office and thinking of the chilly bowels of this now out-dated theatre where the administrative staff and design and wardrobe are housed I suggest that the Company is flailing against somewhat fearful odds.

"Oh, it's not so bad. The theatre has its problems, it's inflexible in the sense of the auditorium, in terms of ambience and relationship with the audience, but no worse in those terms than the Drama Theatre at the Sydney Opera House! Besides, there's something about being housed in adversity, hunger is part of the artistic endeavour and creates horizons to strive for — a glow as an edge of "rogues and vagabonds!"

Stephen Barry certainly has faith in this "new look" for the National Theatre Company in its 25th year and it will be interesting to look back a year from now on its 26th birthday and see if the injection of varied theatrical talents has had therapeutic effect enough to enable the aging lady of Pier Street to counter her young rivals.



Schott (as Martinberg) and Rimmer (as Sir Robert) in *The Elephant Man*.



Judge Murrell in *No Man's Land*, directed by Stephen Barry — as play *Daddy Warbucks* at Christmas.

# INTERNATIONAL

## U.S.A.

### New Stages for the American Musical

by Karl Lavett

The Broadway musical, an art form that is quintessentially American, is now alive, healthy and resolutely walking backwards into the past.

Through relentless television advertising, Broadway producers have tapped a new and remarkably large audience — one that comes to the theatre two or three times a year, in TV-died and seeks spectacular presentations of totally innocuous subjects. The big Broadway musical is, therefore, a natural. In recent years, except for the considerable contributions of Stephen Sondheim, the Broadway musical has not been too wide-ranging. But it never usually walked backwards until now — backwards into mind-boggling safety and expanding financial security.

Already, many New Yorkers have packed and departed for the finer and grimmer musical pastures of Off and Off-Off-Broadway. On the smaller stages around town, the mini-musical is in full summer flower.

Several recent offerings will give some indication of the diversity of subject matter that can now be encompassed within the mini-musical: *Bloodops* — an English music hall type entertainment with added science fiction costumes performed by an drag comedians; *El Bronx* — based on the tales of Robin Hood, Hispanic style; *Love on the Corner* — a new version of the Daphne and Chloe legend; *The Whore* — alcoholism and drugs in an ethnic community; *The Servant of St. Melo* — about a man who brings disaster to a French city in the late 18th century; *Remembrance* — the opening in New York of a home for abandoned and abused children.

The Off-Broadway musical that has created the most attention recently has been William Finn's *March of the Fabergé at Playwrights Houses*. The musical has an idiosyncratic or semi-surreal "book", but consists of twenty songs telling the story of Miami, who leaves his wife and son to live with a male lover. To com-

plete this "right-keel fairly" group is the playboy (Jo both Marvin and his wife Tanya who promptly falls in love with Tanya when Marvin moves out. The son, Jason, is some sort of grandchild and the only wise one in the group as the neurons turn into blossoms on the stage.

William Finn's art is that he explores the spirit and emotion of the situation chiefly in his music (jumpy, discordant, original) and lyrics (precocted, confessional, seamless). Songs entitled "Four Jews in a room talking" and "My father's a home" are not quite the usual Broadway fare. One could hope for more conventional melody and the emotional arias, but probably Mr Finn knows what he is doing. Certainly his director, James Lapine, does. There is an enormous straightforwardness about the show and the performance that results in a tense, dense work. Unhappily, in all this angst and theatrical attack there doesn't seem time to come to know or care for any of these characters. The early writer Mr Finn's intention.

The women's movement has already given two worthwhile mini-musicals to New York audiences: *The Club* and *I'm Getting My Act Together And Taking It On The Road*. The latest contribution, *I Can't Keep Running In Place*, at the Westside Arts Theatre, hopes to evaluate these two successful feminist forays. The musical's not too promising premise is a workshop in women's adolescence training run by a psychologist (that time it's



Reilly Rose

the ever reliable and classy Marcia Rodd in an unswerving role).

The musical is the work of a multi-talented woman in her mid-30's, Barbara Silverstenthal. She wrote the book, music, lyrics, orchestrations and vocal arrangements. As well as the useful score, she has created seven interesting female characters with humour and compassion well beyond her years. Add to this a final dramatic confrontation that is skillfully written and

surprisingly touching. Only in the lyrics does her immaturity peep through. The cast is near perfect with Helen Gallagher as an embittered wife of a dentist bringing a Broadway-style attack that really rocks the small Off-Broadway house.

While all the consciousness-raising is happening upstairs at the Westside Arts Theatre, downstairs there is an affectionate mental tribute to the Bowdell Sisters, *The Brother Jerries*. Written by Mark Hampton and Stuart Ross and directed by Mr Ross with obvious love and attention to detail, this is a first class musical review that again borrows from the rich treasure trove of American popular song. Although in conventional biographical form, the presentation is neat and witty and celebrates the charm of the human voice. After the naked efforts on Broadway where the word is always above, behind or beyond, the pleasure of doc humming singing in an intimate setting is very welcome. The singing is superb and as the three sisters are Naney McCall, Audrey Levine, and Melvyn Levy (they don't write names like that anymore). This is the kind of show that could give nostalgia a good name.

The tradition of recent small reviews would surely be *Reilly Rose* which featured child songs for (possibly) child audiences. It did, however, introduce two major talents to the Off-Broadway scene: Carol King, the pop super composer (music) and Maurice Sendak, probably the most outstanding author (illustrator of children's books in America (book, lyrics, scenic and costume design).

First a book, then an animated television musical, *Reilly Rose* seems perfectly at home on stage. Exploring the special territory of childhood, Carol King's songs are sprightly and Mr Sendak's book and lyrics are full of scene and charm. And it is good to see a major illustrative artist designing for the theatre. Mr Sendak has already created sets and costumes for *The Magic Flute* at the Houston Grand Opera and it is hoped he will continue to bring his prodigious talent to New York stages.

The continuing health and creative growth of the Off-Broadway musical scene assured. An interesting development is that not only has the Off-Broadway musical divorced itself from its Broadway parent in subject matter and style, but it also seems to have built a devoted following that wouldn't be found in a current Broadway house. What we have are two separate audience groups with no significant crossing over.

A thought to bring a glass to any Off-



# THEATRE/ACT

## Different levels of Williamson

### THE REMOVALISTS THE CLUB

by Janet Healey

June was David Williamson's month in Canberra: two plays, written some years apart and presented at very different levels of both style and achievement, opened within a week of each other.

*The Removalists* was presented by Thaddeus Productions, one of the many unclassifiable theatre groups that are springing up like mushrooms in the ACT. As such it deserves encouragement, and certainly Williamson's early career was a good choice for a first production — a choice influenced, I imagine, by the appreciation of Williamson's name as secondary college drama syllabus.

John Cullis as Sergeant Samuelli and Michael Campbell as Constable Ross handled their extended opening and closing scenes quite well, without being able to completely disguise the excessive length of these scenes. Not all Cullis's mastery of intonation and gesture could overcome a sense of tedium. Margaret de Mottis as the hostile and domineering Kate was excellent, but the role of Fiona Carter did not suit Tamara Rota — she seemed uneasy and lacked dramatic confidence.

Denis Mackay as Kenny Carter seemed in the performance of the night. Is he, perhaps, the fine edge of subconized violence, but compensated by realising Kenny is not so much an (assumed) brute as a man lost in a world of alien values. Steve Hartnett's *Removalist* was a delight. The nuances of the character were perfectly mastered, from the drawing combinations of primitive honesty and fundamental fairness to the stark of lunacy appearing above the hyper-joints.

Nevertheless, despite strong casting and a production which offered some imaginatively unrealistic touches such as the slow-motion beatings under a crimson strobe, there were major flaws, one of which was the venue. Although I, along with many other old Canberraers, have a sinking foreboding for the appalling Children Street Hall, it is still bitterly cold and hideously uncomfortable.

Staging the play in the round fought against the underlying sense of the action as confined in small spaces. The dramatic



Ken Mason, Des Langanagh, Phil South, Bob Longbottom, Joe Woodward, Des McWhirter and David Burt of *The Club*

potential of this claustrophobia was not entirely utilised since the actors were in general expert enough to create it imaginatively, but one did feel that their task would have been easier on a traditional stage with the invisible fourth wall.

*The Club* at the Aussie Football Club was a very different experience. It began with a film clip of the 1943 VFL Final made for American viewers — catering for the majority of the audience and instructive for the minority (us). The author's gift for evoking compassion and even affection for thoroughly odious people was well developed by the time *The Club* was written. Tim Bates and Woodward produced a compacted mass of humour from comic situations and unforgettable one-liners — a necessary approach for such an audience — while never losing sight of the human authenticity of situation and character. The illusion of the privacy of the Boardroom was sustained, with the audience cast as flies on the wall.

Des McWhirter as Jack Riley, golfable, unimpeachably ex-President, was seen here in a role he must have been waiting for all his life: he simply couldn't put a foot or an eyebrow wrong. He was ably abetted by Ken Mason in his first legitimate stage role as Ted Parker, current President under chair from married uncle and his own indorsements. Des Langanagh as Gerry Cooper, smooth-talking manager and PR man, and Bob Longbottom as Danny Rowe, aging captain of the team, gave

strong support.

There were weaknesses in the two remaining roles, coach Laurie Hobbs and prospective star player Geoff Hayward, played by Joe Woodward and Phil South respectively. Woodward was physically not quite right for his role, and this stood out particularly in a production where the physical testing was otherwise spot-on. South looked right, but lacked the authority of the angry young rebel against a set of values that provide his living but are not suited to him.

But these are qualities. If one index of a production's success is audience enjoyment, this one passed with flying colours and when minor flaws become obvious only upon reflection, the critic is surely justified in awarding an honourable grade.

*The Removalists* by David Williamson. A Thaddeus production. Children's Hall, Canberra ACT. Opened June 1981.

Director: Les Shipley, Designers: Les Shipley, Terry Henley, Lighting: Paul Mason, Stage Management: Helen Lewis and Kerrie Madden. Cast: Constable Neville Ross: Michael Campbell, Sergeant Des Samuelli: John Cullis, Kate Mason: Margaret de Mottis, Fiona Carter: Tamara Rota, Kenny Carter: Dennis Mackay, Rob: Steve Hartnett. (Photo by)

*The Club* by David Williamson. A Board Room and Joe Woodward production. Aussie Football Club. Canberra ACT. Opened June 1981.

Director: designers: David Bates. Design: John Cull. Ted Parker: Ken Mason. Jack Riley: Des McWhirter, Gerry Cooper: Des Langanagh, Laurie Hobbs: Joe Woodward, Danny Rowe: Bob Longbottom, Geoff Hayward: Phil South. (Production)

# THEATRE/NSW

## Nimrod diversity

### PROTEST TEETH/SMILES VENETIAN TWINS

by Michael Le Morgan

Three plays presented by Nimrod in Sydney show the company's diversity. The three current co-artistic directors take responsibility for one each. John Hill directs a return season of *The Venetian Twins* at the Seymour Centre, Neil Armfield directs David Hare's *Teeth* at the Sydney Theatre Centre and Aubrey Mellor directs *Protest*, a brilliant work by the imprisoned Czech playwright Václav Havel, at Nimrod Downstairs.

The next four plays for Upstairs have just been announced, and look promising. They include Ron Blair's *Last Day In Washington* and a new play by the gifted Stephen Sewell, *Whisper The Dog's World*. The Upstairs Theatre is in urgent need of a couple of successes.

The Downstairs Theatre seems to be continuing the tradition and fulfilling the promise of the original Nimrod in its early years at the Stables Theatre in Nimrod Street, Darlinghurst. It is still a venue for radical, innovative contemporary theatre, with a political and social conscience, a sense of humour, strong intellect and genuine emotions. Artistically, it is probably the most valuable theatre in the country.

*Protest* is a group of three one-act plays set in post-Dubcek Czechoslovakia. Separately and together, they make a powerful and cogent plea for a more compassionate understanding of the needs of the individual. Interestingly, although Václav Havel's work attacks him and satirises social behaviour under a totalitarian government, his observations of human character are just as apposite and perceptive when applied to a supposedly democratic society.

Havel himself is at this moment in jail in Czechoslovakia for having the temerity to pass unfavourable comment on the government of Mr Husak. He is due to be released, after a four and a half year sentence, on 29 November, 1983. An established and internationally recognised playwright in the 'sixties, his work was banned at home after the Russian invasion of 1968 and he was forced to take a job as a labourer in a brewery.

His experience there forms the sub-



John Walker (left) and Barry Otto (right) rehearsing for Nimrod's *Protest*

stance of the first one-act play, *Amadeus*. It is an encounter between the worldly-wise old realiser who continues to spend most of his time at work drinking beer, and the comparatively innocent writer, Vaneck, who doesn't drink much and merely just wants to get on with the work.

The realiser (Barry Otto) is a symbol of one of the ordinary worker and of petty authority. He thinks he knows what makes men tick, he has used and manipulated those weaker than himself for years, and has, in his turn, been used and manipulated by those more powerful or ruthless than himself. But this writer protests that he doesn't understand his motivation, he doesn't know how to bribe him.

Vaneck (John Walker) is friendly enough, eager to please, at least on the surface. But he will not pretend. It is he who finally refuses to make the necessary compromises to form a bond with the realiser. While denying and deprecating the middle class status that sets him apart from the realiser (and from the masses) he affirms it and uses it to sustain his self-confidence through the time at the brewery.

These tables are turned in the second play, *Private Face*. The writer is once again on the outer, but this time the protagonists are a fashionable, well-to-do couple who used to be his "best friends" before he fell from his position of privilege.

Vera and Michel (Cathy Downes and Barry Otto) have succeeded in surrounding

themselves with exclusive material possessions, a luxurious apartment, antiques, sculpture, paintings, Bourbon and the latest rock music, from America, etc. In the game of polite conversation they boast about each object in turn, and when they run out of objects they boast about Vera's cooking. Michel's job, their relationship and their sex-life.

By this stage, Vaneck is utterly embarrassed and alarmed at the prospect of spending the rest of the evening with a pair of human leeches who are desperate for his approval of their self-indulgent way of life. Once again, Vaneck makes a stand for a principle where charity and fellowship might have led him to betray it.

In the third play, *Protest*, Vaneck goes to visit another old friend, Stanek (Barry Otto) in a third magnificent sumptuous characterisation. Stanek is an older man who chose to compromise by supporting the Husak government rather than risk unemployment and poverty.

With fewer of the verbal games and repetitions of the earlier plays, this is a painful portrait of a man who knows he has taken the soft option, abandoning his principles and the truth. He is hypocritical and self-deceiving, but he is also intelligent enough to understand his own moral porosity. That knowledge is his feeling punishment and Vaneck stands almost a mute witness.

There is much more to these plays than I have been able to discuss. They are

passionate, thoughtful, ingenious, moving and questioning rich food for mind and heart. Aubrey Miller's direction is much more positive than in his debut (*Three Strangers*) and he is well served by a cast who accept themselves.

It is difficult to feel any enthusiasm for the University production. *Torch a Sinker*, by British theatre director and playwright David Hare. Set at a May Ball at a Cambridge College (1844) in 1849, it is a play whose wit does not quite stretch to cover its pretensions.

The characters are the members of a rock group playing at the Ball; their casually manager, Sullivan (Ian Robertson) the innocent undergraduate co-garner, Armit (Warren Coleman) and longest but committed Arthur Robert Menzies a songwriter.

We are immediately in the world of popular fantasy. There are stereotypes of such characters firmly lodged in the communal imagination. David Hare evokes these stereotypes accurately gives them a string of smart one-liners to say and some predictable things to do, generally connected with drugs and sex, and does not trouble himself to develop other characters or drama beyond the level of the superficial.

It is strongly suggested that the event is a clash between two cultures, an accidental battlefield on which the old world prevails

of aristocracy and intellect meets the new karm-kart pilots of rock, singers, abusive, populist and revolutionary.

Arthur, the songwriter, is in a unique position to observe this cultural collision, having graduated from the college a year earlier and completed his education with the rock group. Arthur names an unrequited passion for the lead singer, Maggie (Colleen Dorris) but he is too sophisticated and well-educated to win her heart.

The playwright achieves the remarkable feat of being both cynical and sentimental at the same time (two unattractive qualities often thought to be mutually exclusive). While affecting a wistful yearning for the wild dream, he manages to denote it and misrepresent it as well.

The strength of Neil Armistead's early work as a director (*Tommy Sticks* for SUDS, *Uprate Down on the Bottom of the World*, *Tramcar* and *Inside the Island*) for Nambury was his ability to focus attention and dramatic energy on the significant moments of a play, to dramatise vividly and clearly what the playwright was trying to say. In *Torch a Sinker*, as in Armistead's last production *The Choir*, there is nothing to focus on, because the ideas have not been fully thought through by the writer, the realism is shaky and the fantasy is unconvincing. A stronger intellectual base is needed.

The cast work valiantly to breathe some life into the piece, then make the most of the comedy and there is some entertaining character work, notably from Geoffrey Rush, Robert Menzies, Michelle Brandon and Gerry Waddell. There is also some lead but average rock music, which is audible and extremely annoying even in the Dominion Theatre. *Torch a Sinker* is a shallow play which goes nowhere slowly.

*The Freeman Tiers*, Nick Enright and Terence Clarke's fairly musical, is a jolly romp which richly deserves its current revival for a national tour.

It presents the unusual spectacle of an entire cast apparently enjoying themselves enormously, and the atmosphere is contagious.

There are outstanding performances from Drew Forsyth as both men, Jon Ewing as the villainous and Valerie Butler as the poor maid.

The staging is less effective at the Seymour Centre than it was at the Opera House because the thrust stage is more separate from the visible wings, making the show more of a concert party.

On the opening night I felt some of the technical devices and business were being overworked, possibly because of the cast's familiarity with the text. This company should respond well to their various audiences around the country and I think the production will give people a lot of pleasure.

Written by Stanley Huxell. Musical Direction by Sydney NSW. Opened June 18, 1981.

Direction, Aubrey Miller. Designers, Paul Baskin. Lighting, Jonathan Cullen. Stage Manager, Anne Marie Shogren, Lee Anne Donohue. Cast: Enright, John Walker, with Barry Oline, Cathy Rowland. (Fresh review)

Written by Neil Armistead. Musical Direction, Sydney NSW. Opened June 17, 1981.

Direction, Neil Armistead. Designers, John Keaney. Musical Director, Michael Kahan. Lighting, Raymond Williams. Stage Manager, Mark Robinson. Cast: Rush, Gerry Waddell, Arthur, Robert Menzies, Ian and Michelle Brandon, Nick and Rosie, John and Jack Walker, Francis, Geoffrey Rush, Gerry Waddell, George, Maggie, Warren, Barry Hare, Production Manager, Maggie Wright. Stage and Company Manager, Anne Huxell. (Fresh review)

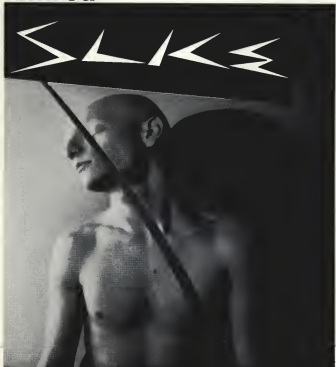
*The Freeman Tiers*, Book and lyrics by Nick Enright, music by Terence Clarke, based on the play by Graham Lunn at the Seymour Centre, York Theatre, Sydney NSW. Opened June 4, 1981.

Direction, John Bell. Musical Director, Terence Clarke. Musical Director on tour, Sharon Rastler. Designers, Stephen Corrie. Lighting, Jonathan Cullen. Choreographer, George Hare. Barry Hare, Production Manager. Maggie Wright, Stage and Company Manager, Anne Huxell. Cast: Colleen Dorris, Valerie Butler, Bronson Anne Ryan, Judge, Lesley McDougall, Brynne, Barry Leary, Zaneen, Brian, Drew Forsyth, Francis, Jon Ewing, Rosalie, John Johnson, Glenda Tony Molloy, Terence, Erlo, Tony Taylor, Anthony, John McEneaney. (Fresh review)



John Walker, Drew Forsyth, Valerie Butler and Geoffrey Rush in Nambury's *Tommy Sticks*.

# nimrod



The scalpel cuts cleanly through the first layer of sun-tanned skin. A second stroke cuts the pinker layers beneath. A third parts the tissues and reveals the red and blue, wet and pulsing organs below.

*So, too will Slice cut — into the metropolis.*



# THEATRE/NT

## Lacked conviction

### MERCHANT OF VENICE

By Sue Williams

A Shylock more charismatic than the gloomy weak Antonio seemed to reduce problems in the Barrow Theatre Group's production of *Merchant of Venice*.

For a modern audience, unacquainted anti-Semitism is not easily acceptable. Arguably, the play centres on the Jew as a foil and the merchant championed. However, Shylock was interpreted as a materialist, rather than the seaver and underdog, which is the conventional portrayal. But the play requires a strong Antonio to ensure the audience is not swayed by Shylock's impassioned plea. Although he looked the part, Bob Woodward's tepid Antonio was no foil for Alan Youngson's forceful and brooding Shylock.

This imbalance created a dichotomy between intention and effect. Fervent compassion for the Jew, the audience could not approve the progress Christian. A later balance was achieved in the final scene, when Youngson's eloquence and Maryanne Haslam's excellent Portia. She played the stern arbiter with clarity.

and avoided conflict between this and Portia's other role. His compassion in this aspect she brought confidence and respect.

Michael Galsworthy, as her lover, Bassanio, lacked conviction, highlighting the play's incomprehensible marriage of the unlikely, experienced in virtue and honesty. Weakness in the quality of both Bassanio and Antonio was the production's most serious flaw.



Shylock (Alan Youngson) and Portia (Maryanne Haslam) in *The Merchant of Venice*. Photo: Mark Treharne

The minor characters provided humour and warmth. The slapstick Salerio and Solanio were very funny, although they appeared in pairs. Their failure to correct the complex names of the Shakespearean text was probably due to a lack of direction.

rather than talent.

Old Gobbo was a lovely cameo. Mark Norris, as his son, Launcelot, defined the hard conscience dialectic in a series of sharp, articulate monologues that were well-timed images.

Technically, the production was imaginative and visually exciting. It was performed in the open air at the guttural, a World War II bunker that evokes the bitter war. As a performing space it would be the envy of most theatre companies. And the set design of Justin Hall and Steve Haddy maximised the venue. Simple constructed from bamboo, canvas and muslin, the Venetian ships and Prince's Belmont palace were sketched against the night sky with the effect of painting. Several platform structures in the bottom area, allowed shifts in focus and mood.

DTG is predominantly an artistic company, usually bringing a freshness that demands attention. The production of *Merchant of Venice* apart from concept, and magical scoring, lacked conviction.

*The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare. Barrow Theatre Group. Theatrical Director: David Jones. 22, 1991.

Director: Michael Galsworthy. Producer: Justin Hall. Venue: Hobart.

Cost: Graham Bell. Woodward: Peter Woodward. Haslam: Nicky. Alan Youngson. (NT, 1991)

# THEATRE/QLD

## Women at the centre

### NO NAMES... NO PAC & DRILL THE HOMECOMING

by Veronica Kelly

"They can't 'rip it. Natural dabbles. Sometimes to do with them glands' declares Tiger Kelly in QTC's *No Names... No Pac & Drill*. The play has the non-emancipatory dramatic pattern of a central woman character surrounded by confused and competing demands from males, with the concomitant problem of how and at what price, if at all, she might survive. Bob Herbert's Kelly talks loud of the no-doubting code which everyone else in the play chooses or breaks as convenient. The landlady, to whom the code and its

violations are foreign declares it as her Bitch. "I suppose your history does explain it, but this hardly excuses it." This character's intuitive and unswerving class loyalty to the forces of law render her the play's pre-eminent villain, from whom Grace Wheeler gleefully extracts every source of predatory satisfaction.

Yet *No Names* does veer in its last few pages from more fully dealing with the intriguing sexual questions sketched in its ropes and lightning plot, and plunks for a seemingly more glacial solution. Kelly's attraction for her final decision to save the deceiver Rebel is worked out on psychological terms which become as close as distant to the image of the good-behaved girl who in sacrificing her self affirms the Value of Love. Partially drawn as self-reliant and confident, the character faces a double burden in having to accommodate the six-role code as well as that of the correct brotherhood "You're not a MAN" she spots, like Scarlett O'Hara, at the

hewilded Rebel, who of all the men has done least to earn this sexual attraction. Maybe it is the play's point that a woman can take the confining codes too seriously, for her own good, while at the same time keep changing the rules, but it makes a heavy charge of direction in the play's concluding scenes.

In an oddity, in and in places redundant as which does anything but make the last stage look smaller, the production's success is assured by the three young actors who stars most of the play. Graham Harvey and Merrin Greening, both new to Brisbane, are an attractive central duo. Harvey's Rebel, no middle manipulation

is basically a bludge, but started led through into a combat where violence is more than he can take, a valid and believable reading which certainly has home in terms of the Vietnam situation, whether or not it works for the second War context. Duncan Wess makes the most of the well written role of Tiger, the

street-wise survivor who has turned his own sexual errors and guile to a judicious working of a racket but upon his sleeping dad, and thus oddly is best qualified to point the play's Ibsen-like moral about where woman's first duty lies: "The smart, cool . . . look after yourself."

As *La Bête*, a finely-tuned and beautiful-looking production by Malcolm Stillebroer of *The Menagerie*, a play whose voracious but abashed sexual sub-currents can also seem pretty glandular in origin. Not so however in this reading, which refuses to become a display of fanged dooms and shows the victory of consciousness over thymosmosis.

Brooks' Flowers' wonderful anthems and sensitive domestic work deliver a moving and engaging Ruth who becomes the main problem of that part, that the character is problematically representative written only as the other characters see her in their various moods and fears, while the audience is denied the objective and more sane view of her that is held about the male characters. This sense of a Ruth as she is to herself must be supplied by the scene, and this Ruth displays an iron will and a breathtaking emotional courage which make her destined to replace the dead mother as a positive rather than a self-destructive act.

The well-balanced cast makes every role a winner. Particularly strong is Michael Auzan's miserable Max, the butcher-long whose powers are fading. The scenes of tension between him and Alan Emick's gently spoken Teddy make it clear that the real battle is between these two, with the master of Ruth seen by them as the condition for a temporary stand-off. The pointed reading of the speech "Lenny is polished" (read by Ian Cadder) is a light slantish in comparison. Lenny, being as the dial has become and may be always, was basically all talk. A great play, which bravely states and confronts fears and desires which make the pretty common of the persistence of the one woman and several men seeking patterns is anything to be proud of.



*Transfer Flowers (Marty) and How Good can (Toby) in Le Bois: The Homecoming*  
Photo: Gary Wilson

## Overlong and strong direction

A SEASON AT CLAYTON'S  
THE RESISTIBLE RISE OF  
ARTURO U

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Squad Jackson is an Adelaide solicitor and a *Sonnet* at Churchill has first professionally produced play. No doubt his professional commitments have prevented his being present at many of QFC Langan's rehearsals, but one hopes that when he does get up to see Betty Reno and Page Donaldson's vibrant performances, he may realise how much meaning the play needs if it is to achieve a sizeable life length and reach.

This is a two-binder for women (perhaps therefore welcome in itself for compassion and humour) but buying rather lazily into a market already covered by a number of recent plays, that of the frustration and isolation of the suburban housewife tied to the bustling pace of domesticity while the experiments of life pass her by.

The action, mostly wondrously reflective scenes, around the presumably daily ritual of the tea and that in the kitchen of Reryl Clayton a wordy, and occasionally appealing, monstrosity equipped with an arsenal of super-acoustic winks and devastating programs which the lobs, like mass-conventional ballads, resembles at unseen targets in the world beyond, neighbors, family, priests, minor officials etc. Her interlocutor and neighbor, Dymghis, is a good-natured soul characterized by little more than a simple faith, whose main job is to act as a sort of supernatural glue through which Reryl hymns in his her awesome letters.

The play then is very much Beryl's and aims, close to securing the cards of the

disjunctive monodrama, especially in the shortcomings of the opening first act. Beryl is a woman who suffered a bitter marriage, been left on the shelf of middle-aged widowhood and who now feels the cold wind of old age blowing through the house. Only in the second act with the news of death in the family, does Ellison set up a stimulating tension between the characters. Otherwise the script depends too much on a self-conscious literature, which could be sloughed off with more consultation between writer and director. As one becomes accustomed to Beryl's elaborate repartee, her rather insubstantial character emerges as a well-padded dummy (Pinter is death of a coxite). On a purely technical level, both actors, on opening night were stumbling over lines about one or two classes too slow.

The *Bravado* line of Amara is perhaps Steele's most theatrical piece, dealing as it does with the gaudy, circumstantial contrivance played by a small-time hoodlum in order to set himself up as a death-dealing doctor. As its contrivance (literally and metaphorically) is the brilliant score based on Hitler's habit of practicing as kind of a mirror, in which he took lessons in performance from a bare actor and unconsciously parrots his rhetorical flourishes and attitudes into the now familiar grandstanding stance, the contrived gestures of emphasis and of course, the overexaggerated

Here there is a particular welcome for those of us final year acting students, the richness and purposefulness of Berio's are there providing a training ground in microcosm. Mick Hodgson's first production at IDHAE is full of strong directional statements (I especially liked the use of a smokes atmosphere and a design exploring the musical motifs of saxophone and string) and he is well thought through the opera and is largely self-providing on their resources. The stage is wide and bare, the freedom to track material and the introduction of songs from other Brechtian and non-Brechtian sources serves to deepen the ensemble work.

Barry Seal's *Us* is more confident in the early depiction of a little clown who ideas above his station but fails to bring to bear the strength required to give the final "tomorrow the world" speech the heroic impact a disaster. Brownie Naylor brings an absolute verisimilitude to the Barker character, convincingly transposed into a female role.

*A Journey to Chinatown* by Stuart Gilman. QTC  
Langston Productions. Released: Video: Thriller. Area:  
Home. QM: Opened June 1988.

**Director:** Gregory Curre, Designer: James E. Wood  
**Lighting:** James Hanson, Stage Manager: Kristin

Class: Morph, Faye Donaldson, Dymphna, Betty Ross,  
(Apostrophes)

To: Justice To: Registered No. Date Received  
Queensland Mortgage Co. 46423 Mortgage No. 46423-104  
Closed June 12, 1961

Division: Peter Duncan, Director; James Hildebrand, Planning; James Henson, Capital Management; Patrick Whelan, Helen Kennedy.

Can. Robert Douglas Harvey, Esq. Married; son of  
Jesse Charles Jones, Esq. Grandchild of (grandmother)  
John Duncan Watt. Mrs. Fyfe. Cousin Walter,  
Brewing. Laurence Dodge, Esq. Patrick Reid  
Esq. John McArthur Esq. Esq. Peter Douglas  
(Esq. deceased)

The Homecoming by Harold Pinter is both  
 a masterpiece (1961) and a home (1961)

**Executives:** **Marcello Bisignani**, Designer; **John Anne Connolly**, Sales Manager; **David Foster**, Gen. Mgr.; **Michael Aronson**, Buyer; **Sam Fisher**, Sales; **Alan Friedman**, Merch. Director; **Flowers, Inc.**, Michael Blooper; **Sam Robt Nicholas**.

# THEATRE/SA

## Two superlative performers

FAREWELL BRISBANE LADIES

by Michael Morley

Kevin Palmer's panning production is a play of leavetakings and new beginnings: it also turns up and exemplifies the strengths of his approach to his period of stewardship. It is, usually, even extravagantly Australian direct, humorous and colourful. And it provides two superlative performers with roles which, if not as rich as they initially promise to be, are nevertheless clearly fashioned.

The ladies of the title have seen better (or rather more lucrative) days, though even on the big league they obviously had a fair range of customers for their merchandise. Some neat jokes are had on the subject of the goods they once offered — not muslin, haberdashery or assorted hardware, but their bodies and their company.

Magpie Kirpatrick's Winnie is the leader, however of the two, and the relationship between them is very much along the lines of that explored in Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple*. Not that Doreen Clarke's piece is an unadorned copy of the American original: its social aspects and the situation are too distinctive for that. But if there is one major weakness in the script it is the author's inability to sustain her story-line over the two acts. One is left



Magpie Kirpatrick (*Winnie*) and Monica Maughan (*Gert*) in *For S.C. Sell's Farewell Brisbane Ladies*. Photo: David Wilson

with the feeling that nothing much happened after Act I, not altogether true, in fact, but the ending in particular is lame and contrived. It may be necessary for agonised critics to succor at Simon, but his plays are dramaturgical models. Any author looking to develop situation comedy for the theatre could do far worse than study his technique.

After the arrival of Winnie, uninvited and somewhat unwelcome, the patterns of superiority and compromise are fairly well worked through by the end of Act I. Gert (Monica Maughan) has left her past behind and done her best to be accepted into the North Queensland township where she has retired. She stands sources instead of bridge of fine parties and is well on the way to acceptance as a pillar of the community. In between Winnie, largely and brightly clad in skin tight, screaming pink slacks, and the initial exuberance and surprise on Gert's part are soon replaced by uneasiness and requests for Winnie's immediate departure. Seven weeks later, after a row, she takes the last of a series of broad hints and returns to the city — only to ensure that Gert will eventually follow her there.

Monica Maughan's Gert, all assumed respectability and wuxpho pretence, and Magpie Kirpatrick's Winnie, noisy, overbearing, ornate and hugely (in every sense) comical, are splendid characterisations. Their turning in well-worn farcical, their feel for the pointed joke or showman's observation spot on. And Kevin Palmer's production allows them space to develop their relationship.

Space is also cleverly exploited by Sue Russell's neat and atmospheric set design, though it should have preferred a less obvious solution to the central and side

exit problem.

There are few enough pressures among Australian plays and both director and author are well served by two performers working intelligently and sympathetically on a script which could be improved. Not to the performers themselves, which are a delight from beginning to end.

*Farewell Brisbane Ladies* by Doreen Clarke. State Theatre Company, Playhouse. Address: 54, Queen Street, Brisbane.

Director: Kevin Palmer. Designer: Sue Russell. Lighting: Nigel Levinge. Stage Manager: Rex Mathews.

Cost: Sue Anderson. Monica Maughan, Winnie Magpie; Magpie Kirpatrick.

## Cruelty and compassion

SAMEZDAY TOMORROW'S NEWS

By Gus Warby



Lynette Oliver and Amanda Whitham in *Design: Tomorrow*.

### AUDITIONS ACTORS/MUSICIANS Male and Female

The Central and Northern Queensland Theatre Company will make its debut in January, 1985. The Company will present a season of contemporary theatre with a strong musical emphasis in Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton and Mackay.

Auditions from actors preferably with musical or other performance skills will be held in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. The Company is also looking for a keyboard player/musical director and will be interviewing designers, production staff and stage managers. Those interested, write immediately with biography and photograph to Peter Barclay or Terry O'Connell, Artistic Directors, Central and Northern Queensland Theatre Company, Civic Theatre, TOWNSVILLE, Queensland.



# THEATRE/TAS

## Successful and pleasurable

### UNDER MILKWOOD

by Pamela Hyland

Polygon Theatre Company presented Dylan Thomas' *Under Milkwood* 'on the darkness', 'simply and warmly'. The eccentricities of the original characters were unproblematically displayed by ten people on stage, some of whom occasionally

was more Irish than Welsh. Overall the rhythm seemed uncertain. The cyclic nature of the play was completely broken by the singing of 'Water' at the finale. The one spring day is balled into the little black night and should stay there. The eternal sadness and loneliness of the last scenes was overwhelming.

These problems were not serious when compared with the fine individual performances and with the sense of unity and pleasure that the company generated. John Hall was most remarkable and convincing in his varied and sympathetic portrayals, teasing and jolly as Heccher. Between all-caring, all-singing and progress



Maryn Brown, John Hall, Keith Marshall and Chris Harvey in Polygon's *Under Milkwood*

moved from their playing space.

The cast worked well together. The tick track of C on Glass clocks and the trills at breath on a golf ball became chorine sounds and the sound flowed from character to character. Only a slight change of hat or hairstyle or shoe made a difference. There were problems however. The audience was startled and bewildered by the grunting noise of the tourter, his preceding the voice of the guide book, and the sadness of prose disappeared in a jitting and jotted reaction to name-snapping tourists. The voice of the guide book should be an external, objective evaluation of Milk-Wood as a place of little intrinsic value. The actors are really frozen in time. The voice works best as a disembodied, anonymous, preferably "foreign" one.

Although most characters managed a fair extension of a Welsh accent, some were not valiantly differentiating one character from another and at least one

as Captain Cat flicking his silver-top and adding spectacles to become the Reverend. He speaking intently as Mr Prechard. Hazel Alger moved with ease through her range of characters. She contrasted the iceberg, briefly laundried Mrs Ogmore-Prechard with the gaffer, adopting Mrs Ann Sullys. She changed on the cobble as Mrs Dan Bred One "here to be easy" and shrieked mindlessly, with large eyes, as Mrs Heccher Noyon.

It is difficult in a rapping waltz of words to keep every one of them as Thomas intended. But the evening was successful and pleasurable, encouraging the audience to share. Part of the value and interest in Milk Wood is not so much that it is so much Welsh but that perhaps like those prepared are universal. Polygon welcomed more odd attempts and won new followers, as usual.

*Under Milkwood* by Dylan Thomas. Polygon Theatre Company. Hobart. 1st August, Jan. 17, 1981.

Thomas, Dylan  
Cast: Hazel Alger, Keith Marshall, Martin Brown, John Hall, Dave Harris, Wayne Hoffmann, Jim Hobbins, Susan Le Maitre, Rosalie Taylor, Richard Paul, Wendy Thomas  
(P. 17, 1981)

## Uneven and vocally poor

### INNER VOICES

By Amanda Forbes

This is the Hibernian Union Theatre Company's third season in Hobart. Previously it performed *New Blood* and *The Price*, both written by Sarah McEachern. Tasmania's only representative at this year's National Playwrights Conference in Canberra. *The Price* has since sold to the MTC. Hibernian Union evolved out of the Hibernian Union, a 200 members' united eight years ago in the 1960s. *Voices* runs 4 weeks. Hibernian Union is working to achieve professional status and performs three plays per year. This year they've been given a grant against loss by the Tasmanian Arts Advisory Board.

The Company's current production of Louis Nowra's *Inner Voices* at the Philip Smith Theatre is a very uneven one, hampered by the poor venue and an abjectly cramped stage, reminiscent of school speech nights. If the Company intends using the Philip Smith again it would be better off searching some of its technical effects and performing in the round as other companies have chosen to do on this site.

Danish Morgan is that guy, the only convincing performance, of the evening. The rest of the cast need a good deal of vocal work before they reach professional standards. If the Company plans a series of workshops and seminars beginning in August and those should result in improvements in that area.

Meanwhile, Hobart theatregoers will be grateful to the small companies such as Hibernian Union for waging new work at a time when Tasmanian Theatre Company's programme is such a bore and conservative one.

*Inner Voices* by Louis Nowra. Hibernian Union Theatre Company. Philip Smith Theatre, Hobart. 1st August, Jan. 1981.

Cast: Danish Morgan, Wendy Morgan, Wayne Hoffmann, Susan Le Maitre, Keith Marshall, John Hall, Jim Hobbins, Richard Paul, Wendy Thomas  
(P. 17, 1981)



## A Mixed Show Bag

by Suzanne Spenser

In keeping with the show bag metaphor one could proceed to excavate its contents as an archaeological festival, beginning at the layer chronologically furthest from the excavator and describe a movement from the invisible 19th century consciousness of E. W. Cole, to the Cold War, post-romantic angst of Sylvia Plath, to the asserted manifestations of early seventies school personality of Fincher and on in the synchrony with the alteration of language and effect via television and mass media, and a corresponding inference could be drawn about theatrical style from the antediluvian layers of naturalism to new wave performance.

Steve Vizard has written numerous cabaret and theatre restaurant shows but *Cole's Faces*, *Private Persona* his first play. E. W. Cole was an acute businessman and bookmaker, and idiosyncratic philosopher. He preached with unflagging energy on the rights of children to enjoyment from instruction, the unity of black and white races, and the incalculable qualities of the humble apple. He combined free thinking

with entrepreneurial flair and rose from selling books from a barrow in the Euxton Market to a vast and woodstock book arcade and in his own words, "made a temple of the market place". There he sold his own works, his literary center of the Cokes Funny Picture books so that the children of the new world might laugh and learn simultaneously.

Vizard's portrait of Cole emphasises the more business elements of his personality, while it is sympathetic it never delves below the surface, but means Cole as the name lends as he promoted himself. Under Paul Hampton's direction, Norman Kaye's performance was attractively whimsical and most beguiling but neither heroic enough to sustain the cartoon aspect of the writing nor subtle enough to suggest a more complex reading of the character. Paul Kitchner's set was a masterpiece of scenic painting and it led to one of the best moments in the play when Cole utters his book arcade, you lift his limited shelves short across the top of the capably stacked shelves of new books.

Since her death in 1963 Sylvia Plath has generated a writer of academic scholarship, and in recent years a succession of dramatic interpretations of her life and art. Rose Lesman Goldemberg's *Letters Home* is based on the extensive series of letters

she wrote to her mother, Aurelia Plath, during her college years out first, and in England later as a poet, wife and mother. The focus of the play is the relationship between Sylvia and her mother, Aurelia and her daughter.

Their relationship is both intensely loving and intensely competitive and their letters both express and disguise this problem.

Goldemberg stresses the way in which daughters are doomed to repeat the patterns of their mothers' lives — her successes and her failures are yours if you only know, and at times this female feminism is heavily handed and clichéd — "Ted was just like Cole...". The weakness of the play is the limitation of its scope — it neither explores the social context of Plath's life nor does it deal with any of her writing. So that we end up with a very limited picture — if it had not been for her poetry we would not be interested in a play about someone's letters to their mother.

The poetry, the work, and what she made of, and from, her life needs to be there with her, the woman, the daughter. Nancy Black's Sylvia in her pastel sweater and berrette was subtly observed and keenly felt and in tandem with Genda Nicolson's Aurelia, the performances were able to hold what was finally a thin text, together. Murray Copland's direction and Audi Barik's design reinforced a sense of something between a films musical and a Joan Crawford melodrama and did little to make the play into more interesting arena.

Tik Tik has been working now since 1977 in the new territories between art, theatre and contemporary music in various performances, installations, gigs at galleries, pubs and parties. But *Television Works* is their first venture into a theatre space and a cabaret form. In *Television Works* they did everything from acting, writing and composing to recording their own sound track, compiling and making video material. *Television Works* was an exploration of the relationship between the viewer and the viewed, or television and its audience and its intention was to analyse and deconstruct that nexus, to make the viewer, an active conductor rather than a passive observer/contemner. Its method was to take examples from current television programmes and deconstruct them by breaking them into their component parts and then record those parts and/or create new and contradictory components and thereby reveal the aesthetic and ideological assumptions beneath the images. Thus the show alternated live action, video playback and original video pieces all of which refracted and clashed with each other.

The concept and technological execution of the show under Ralph Korte's direction was highly sophisticated, stylish



Nancy Black (Sylvia) and Genda Nicolson (Aurelia) in *Private Persona* Letters Home

and provocateur, even if the live performance lacked definition and weight. The group's commitment to finding an accessible fusion of areas in contemporary culture which have become fragmented and self-referring is unassailable and I look forward to seeing more of their work and hope that in their future projects they will begin to tackle the realpolitik with the same creative vigour that they explore artistic practice.

After seeing the *Reveries* new late-night, music cabaret piece, I realised I felt as if (though I was doomed to endless repeats of some of the few good moments) in the APG Ensemble's first show, *Reveries* *Reveries* I just saw the material often and



Renske Giesberg and Joe Spence in *Reveries*

later saw it reworked into a piece at the Last Laugh. Three time round it certainly begins to pale. This version comprising original songs interspersed with sketches has a loose, even lacy thematic thread and a casual structure. It could possibly have worked as much as in the Piano Bar (again) but certainly isn't flat and unengaging in the Back Theatre. All that saved it were a number of clever, boppy songs and a brilliant sketch on unemployment written by Barry Dickson. The show felt desperately in need of an idea, and possibly a director or writer outside the performers could have helped.

After seeing *Reveries* I felt that I was condemned to solving the dramatic music and the modern dance language I'd gone through in the last season. *Reveries* was decorated with an artistic earnestness rarely seen today. It was polished and thorough but I found it devoid of genuine experiment and without any desire to communicate with an audience. At the end of the evening of Renske Giesberg and Joe Spence lived, breathed and moved, despite the bourgeois and antiquarian of the directional effects. By the end I felt that everyone was all dressed up and had nowhere to go. I think what frustrated me most was seeing yet another superficial

treatment of a significant topic — anxiety and psychiatry. It was no doubt sincere but I felt very tired and flat.

**Cable Funnies** *Perrier* *Spence* by Steve Kinnard  
 Remounted. Ppy Ltd. The National Theatre  
 Melbourne. Vn. Opened June 11 1991

**Director:** Paul Hampton **Set Designers:** Paul Redfern,  
 Sage Manager, Ruth Constance, Lighting Designers:  
 Mark Hughes, Paul Hampton **Costs made in**  
 August 1990

**Cost:** Cate Norman **Reps:**  
 (Melbourne)

**Writer:** Home by Rose Lerman Galambow **The**  
 Playhouse Theatre Company **Director:** Melbourne  
 Vn. Opened June 11 1991

**Director:** Murray Cupland **Designer:** Axel Ratz,  
 Lighting Design: John Markell, Stage Manager:  
 Robert Gahan

**Cost:** Helen Clark **Music:** Black, Amelia Black, Garry  
 Neillson

**Production Works:** made and performed by The Ink  
 Company, Philip Hughes, Maria Rana, Leigh  
 Pechetti, Jane Stevenson, Ralph Davidson. Co-  
 Director: Ralph Ratz. Presented by Ratz Ensemble  
 Ppy Ltd. The Mnt. Melbourne. Opened June 2 1991

**Reveries** directed by The Kinnard APG. The Back  
 Theatre. The Piano Factory Melbourne. Opened June  
 21 1991

**Light:** Dave Moore, Ruth Constance, David, John  
 Bishop **Set Design:** John Bishop **Assistant:** John  
 Bishop **Music:** Garry Neillson and Paula Adams

**Cost:** The Rehearsal — Richard Bailey, Val Lockman,  
 Doreen Smith, My First Year: Adam Fowler, Neil  
 Burns, Dave Osborne

**Interpretation:** Script written by Barry Dickson

**Insights** adapted from the works of Sam Shepard, Jay  
 Press, Shirley Jackson, Leonard Maltz, Edward  
 Albee, Anne Sexton, Robert Rauschenberg, Jack Loran  
 American, Margaret Warner, Arnold, Scott Mc  
 Gowan, Vn. Opened June 11 1991  
**Directed and Designed by:** Greg Evans, Choreography:  
 Michael Hennessey, Stage Manager: Marina Mila-  
 novic, Lighting Design: Robb Tucker, Set Design:  
 Greg Evans

**Cost:** Anne, Renske Giesberg, Joe Spence, Doreen,  
 Cate Spence, Peter Maloney, Michael Hennessey

## Grim portrayal of survival

### THE APPOINTMENT

by Cathy Foske

Ruth Mullan's *The Appointment* takes much of its strength from the sensitive way in which it handles subject matter which ranges from the plight of the aboriginals in the Northern Territory to the identity and survival of a young female schoolteacher called Bridget.

Set mainly in Bridget's caravan — an arena that is consistently being invaded by tropical wildlife and the local population — it is also a relatively grim portrayal of survival and the struggle for personal integrity against bureaucratic blunders of racism and oppression.

One of the questions it never asks, but which the whole diverse cast consistently

seem to insist is that of why these people, the whites anyway, are here. With few exceptions, all of them seem to be the victims of circumstances which have cast them into this tropical paradise as nightmare and increased them there.

Tommy, the local ward, brilliantly played by Mark Sherry, certainly couldn't move on, but Valerie, the hapless, frustrated and socially ambitious post-woman, Joan, the dear old eccentric who is losing the pigment of her skin, Allan, the aggressive woman with a major in psychology from UCLA and Bridget herself all find their problems compounded by their living conditions and some curious pathology of the will.



Cate Spence and David Swann in *The Appointment*

In the small space at La Mama, Allan played with a cutting edge of menace by David Swann — almost too large a character. Here, however, well-matched by Nicky Egger's Bridget and an intelligent supporting cast, none of whom degenerate into caricatures — which fact, given their colour and eccentricity, would have been relatively easy.

*The Appointment* has been directed by its author whose interest seems to have mainly been centred on the naturalistic level at which most of the social problems have an intensely personal basis.

It is probably the best way to handle it, although I am not sure whether all the issues that the play raises are really able to be brought back and somehow tied up by Bridget's final euphoria and rejection of Allan. In terms of a rather more dense and unsatisfactory resolution, that might have been more successful if the play had extended a less naturalistic interpretation.

**The Appointment** by Ruth Mullan. La Mama  
 Melbourne Vn. Opened June 3, 1991

**Director:** Ruth Mullan **Production:** Stage Man-  
 agers, Rosemary Gaudin, Vicki Martin

**Cost:** Bridget: Vicki Martin, Tommy: Mark Sherry,  
 Joan: Margaret Roberts, Valerie: Doreen Smith,  
 Allan: David Swann, Pauline: Debbie Rosenberg, M  
 Raymond Robert Campbell



# THEATRE/WA

## Coldness and warmth

### COWARDY CUSTARD UNCLE VANYA

By Joan Ambrose

The policy formed by the Hole in the Wall Board to go dark for 10 weeks in the middle of the year, has this year made space available for other companies to use the theatre.

The first of these productions to fill the between-seasons programme is a Moscow-Miller presentation of *Cowardy Custard's* Uncle Vanya, the title incidentally was chosen by Coward and himself to add the final note to the incredibly successful original production at the Marston in 1973 — and has proved to be a very successful crowd pleaser here in Perth with an extended season planned to move to the Oldham.

Coward's aim, he said, was to amuse, and he had an unerring sense of what would please his contemporaries. His is a style of plotting surfaces, elegance, grace and wit — he was an artist who wrote for and reflected his time.

To achieve a reproduction of Coward's style and pace is a formidable task that this present production of *Cowardy Custard's* did not quite achieve.

This is in no way to denigrate the excellent performances of the cast. In particular Gerald Hinchbrook and Terry Johnson maintained a meticulous attention to style and the audience had the added bonus of Terry Johnson's very attractive singing. And Joan Sydney's 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen' was the highlight of the evening — presented with her great comic talent.

But there was a sense that something was missing.

The costumes, for instance, lacked colour. The theme was basically black and white which created a coldness quite at odds with Coward's gusto. And at some points the production moved almost to parody, so there was the irony of parody on a parody.

All in all, the fine tuning, the assured elegance that is at the base of Coward's style, was lacking in this production.

The second production for June to appear at The Hole in the Wall was *Uncle Vanya*, directed by Ken Campbell-Dobbe with the Actors Company. The Actors Company, a fine group of performers, had



From left: Markian Velinov as Uncle Vanya, Eugene Compagnon as Uncle Vanya. Photo: Mark Rennie

recently lost their venue at St George's Hall and moved to the Hole in the Wall.

Director Ken Campbell-Dobbe chose to interpret the play very literally and successfully as a study of character. Remarkable places, hereditarian characteristics and over-mannerly behaviour which is the frequent, antithetical interpretation given to Chekov, gave way to an emphasis on character and conflict which was evocative and relevant.

We observed and felt the frustration of Alexander Semyonovich, the retired professor whose body is failing and who no longer the centre of academic esteem; we were drawn into the pain of Sonya, unrequited love for Mikhail; and we were involved in the passion of Uncle Vanya and Mikhail. Actors for the beautiful but shallow, Yelena, the young professor's young wife.

That we understood and sympathized with the characters is the real success that Ken Campbell-Dobbe and the actors achieved with *Uncle Vanya* despite some shortcomings in the last act and a few changes. We cared about the people, we moved by their unhappiness and intrigued by the whole interplay of personality upon personality and the perception of the futility of the human condition that we all share, despite time on stage. Powerful reference must be made to the performances of Andrew Warwick as the Professor, Lionel Bartoll as Mikhail, Aaron, and Eibby Stone as Sonya. I trust that there will be more such productions from the Actors Company.

*Cowardy Custard's* Presenting by Moscow Miller in association with The Hole in the Wall, at the Wall Theatre, Perth WA, opened June 4 1991.

Director: Eugene Compagnon. Cast: Joan Sydney, Gerald Hinchbrook, Terry Johnson, Terry Johnson.

Produced by:

Produced by:

Produced by: Andrew Warwick. Actors Company at the Hole in the Wall, Perth WA, opened June 20 1991.

Director: Ken Campbell-Dobbe.

Cast: Eibby Stone, Terry Johnson, Lionel Bartoll, Eugene Compagnon, Robert Whitmore, Robert Perry, Mark Manning, Andrew Warwick, Craig Stone.

Produced by:

## An auspicious start

### ACCIDENTAL DEATH OF AN ANARCHIST

by Colin O'Brien

When the forces of law and order go to logical lengths to protect themselves, perhaps the only way to depict such behaviour in the theatre is through farce. Certainly the actual events on which *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* are based were more outlandish than a Feydeau could possibly dream up. But then we all know the propensity of people in custody to fall over in their cells and damage themselves — they have even been known to fall on a policeman's foot, to judge by the reports. Even more astonishing is the propensity suspects have to be overcome with an uncontrollable urge to fing themselves out of interrogation room windows.

Comedy, even black, black comedy, is a way of distancing us from grim reality, but at its best to reveal the true nature of that reality. In the new Winter Theatre's presentation of *Accidental Death* the script was made especially Australian, as it should be, and was at its best in the second act when the analogies between the Italian and Australian context were drawn. In the first act the sheer frenetic pace of the farce proved wearing after some twenty minutes, but the topicality of the second act retained both play and performance.

Ross Cohn directed the play with skill, and the company (and the public) were fortunate to have the services of Robert Alexander whose work I have admired in Sydney. While lacking the skill and range of Alexander, the rest of the cast compensated to a degree with sheer energy. It was an auspicious start for the new company, committed to providing a somewhat more vigorous, but nevertheless necessary, aspect of a real theatre than the

more established companies can afford to provide consistently

*Accidental Death of an Irishman* by Brian F. White  
 Theatre: Phoenix, May Theatre, Fremantle, WA,  
 Grand Ave 5 years  
 Director: Ross Gird, Designer: Jill Hedley, Lighting:  
 Keith Edmondson, Stage Manager: Catherine Perry,  
 Cost: Michael, Robert Alexander, Rehearsal Room:  
 Bryant, Props: Anne Collins, Conables, Glenn  
 Smith, Supervisor: Michael Graham, Peter  
 Divine Kelly  
 (Professional)

## Lack of real affection

### ON OUR SELECTION

by Cliff Gittan

In anticipation, a good nostalgic right out with Dad and Dave and old-time music in the event, more realism than truth and no real engagement. John Milson's production wobbles with a script too heavily lugged in a very thin and dated romantic melodrama as the actor's cast and too infrequently enlivened rather by the rich possibilities of the idiom and humour of the original, or by musical diversions.

Some very fine performances, notably by James Bean as Dan and Carolyn McKenzie as Kai survive far too many other performances where single level interpretations reduce the characters to lifeless ciphers. Some of the acting was in fact worse than comic, it was downright bad.

Fred Tripp's design, all our back deities and cunningly arranged paces, is one of the production's real pleasures, and it is properly abetted by Duncan Gird's lighting. Not on

the whole the lack of real in the production seemed to beset a general lack of real affection for the material.

*On Our Selection* by Bill Bailey, from Seattle Road  
 presented by George White, National Theatre,  
 Melbourne, March 1981, 2000 of 1981

Director: John Milson  
 Cast: Noel, Geoff Bailey, Martin, Margaret McDonald,  
 John, Helen, Bill Bailey, Sarah, Duncan McDonald,  
 David, James, Peter, Joe, Graham, Nicholas, Sandy,  
 Harry, Elizabeth, John, John, Murray, Bill, Tim,  
 Michael, Malcolm, Ivan King, the Carver, Paul Hall,  
 Peter, David, David, David, David, David, David,  
 (Professional)



Robert Alexander worked with the cast of *Accidental Death of an Irishman* at Phoenix Theatre



Robert Alexander worked with the cast of *Accidental Death of an Irishman* at Phoenix Theatre

DESIGN THEATRE COMPANY  
 PRESENTS



UNFOLD SOME AT  
 THE BOTTOM OF THE WORLD

By David Gird  
 On August 12, 1981

VENUE: GEORGE WHITE THEATRE  
 DATES: AUGUST 12 to 14, 1981  
 BOOKINGS: (08) 400-0000

# GUIDE THEATRE

## A.C.T.

### CAMBERRA THEATRE (49 7899)

*Not Now Darling*, Upstacious comedy starring Leslie Phillips and Andrew Sachs. Presented by Interstar.

Aug 11-15

*The Venetian Twins* adapted by Nick Knight from Goldoni, music, Terence Clarke, director, John Bell, with Drew Forsythe, Valerie Bader, Annie Byron, Jon Ewing, Aleda Johnson, Tony Sheldon, Barry Lowitt, Gordon McDougall, John McTernan, Tony Taylor. Nimrod's most successful musical, encapsulating the best of the "Nimrod style". Aug 18-22.

*Sooty White and the Seven Dwarfs*, The classic fairy tale. Presented by Rudes Organisation. Aug 24-31

### THEATRE THREE (47 4222)

*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, Ray Lawler's Australian classic. A

Reperory production directed by Pamela Rosenberg. To Aug 8

*The Dock Brief* by John Mortimer. Lunch-time theatre. A Reperory

production directed by Phil

Mackenzie. Aug 3-7

*New Found Land* by Tom Stoppard, incomparable wordsmith. Lunch-time theatre. A Thaddeus production directed by Lee Shepley. Aug 15-14, 17-21

*Gypsy*, a Laurence-Styne-Sondheim collaboration. A Tempo production. Director, Ian Howard. Musical director, Rose Iaino. Aug 12-29

### REID HOUSE THEATRE WORKSHOP (47 5281)

*Upside Down at the Bottom of the World* by David Allen. A Jigsaw production directed by Graeme Broome. Dramatisation of D H Lawrence's time in Australia, based on *Kangaroo*. Aug 14-22.

For advice contact Janet Healey on 49 9662/48 4807.



## NSW

### ENSEMBLE THEATRE (929 8877)

*You're a Good Man Charlie Brown* by Charles M Schulz, director, Frank Blackwell, musical direction by Greg Crosser, with Greg Coombes, Lynne Emanuel, Craig Lambert, Robert Lays, Liliana Tekstoria and David Young. Schulz's musical dramatisation of his

popular cartoon strip. Aug 3-22

*The Elephant Men* by Bernard Pomerance, director, Hayes Gordon. Internationally successful drama of the hideously deformed Robert Merrick and his acceptance in Victorian society. Starts Aug 27.

### FRANK STRAIN'S BULL 'N BUSH THEATRE RESTAURANT (357 4627)

A new musical directed by Frank Strain, with Peter Mosella, Garth Meade, Lole Nixon, Barry Hope, Leslee Collins, musical director Julie Symonds. Throughout Aug.

### GRIFFIN THEATRE COMPANY (33 3817)

*The Police* by Slavomir Mrozek, director, Ian Watson. Aug 7-30

### HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (32 3411)

*Evita* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice, director, Harold Prince, with Patti Lu Pone, Peter Carroll, John O'May and Tony Alvarez. One of the most successful musicals ever — and the most expensive — has taken on a new lease of life with the New York star. Throughout Aug.

### HUNTER VALLEY THEATRE COMPANY (949 252755)

Contact theatre for details.

### KIRRIBILLI PUB THEATRE (32 1415)

*The Private Eye Show* by Perry Quinton and Paul Crabb, music, Adrian Morgan, lyrics, PIP Crenney; director, Perry Quinton, with Zoe Bertram, Mergie McGraw, Patrick Ward, Bill Young and Michael Ferguson. Throughout Aug.

### MARIAN STREET THEATRE (486 3188)

*Crossing Niagara* by Alonso Alegria; director, John Milton, with Robert Mecklenberg and Geoff Centaght. Milton's first production as artistic director of Marian Street, a more progressive direction for the theatre with this unusual play about tightrope walker Blondin. To Aug 29.

### MUSIC LOFT THEATRE (977 6565)

*Toaster to the Stars* with Billy Raymond. To mid Aug.  
*Parade Our Privates*. Director, Peggy Mortimer, with Ron Freyer. Starts Aug 22.

### NIMROD THEATRE (999 5093)

*Uptown*. Cloud Nine by Ceryl Churchill; director, Aubrey Melior, with Cathy Downes, Michele Pawdon, Barry Otto, Deirdre Rubenstein, Anna Voloka and John Walton. Strong British comedy about sex roles and relation-

ships between this generation and the Victorians. Starts Aug 12.

*Downstairs*. Slice derived from ideas by Kim Carpenter with words by Tony Strachan and sounds by Michael Carlos. To Aug 30.

*Seymour Centre: The Venetian Twins* adapted from Goldoni by Nick Knight, music, Terence Clark, director, John Bell, with Drew Forsyth, Valerie Bader, Annie Byron, Jon Ewing, Aleda Johnson, Barry Lowitt, Gordon McDougall, John McTernan, Tony Sheldon and Tony Taylor. Revival of Nimrod's most successful musical, encapsulating the best of the "Nimrod style" — first leg of a national tour. To Aug 15.



### NSW THEATRE OF THE DEAF (357 1200)

*Theodore* for primary schools and *The Unheard World Of Jasper Lawson* for secondary schools, both directed by Ian Watson, with Nola Collier, David London, Colin Allen, Bill Eggerking and Margi Brown. Throughout Aug.

### PHILLIP STREET THEATRE (332 8570)

*Who's Afraid Of Virginia Woolf?* by Edward Albee, director, Peter Williams. Albee's now classic marriage drama that punctures the American dream. To Aug 18.

*The Old Woman Who Lived In A Shoe*. Children's pantos. Starts Aug 29.

### PLAYERS THEATRE COMPANY (30 7211)

*Bonny Pavilion Theatre: Trap For A Lonely Man* by Robert Thomas; director, Peter Whitford, with Russell Newman, David Grant, Trevor Kent, Barry Owen, Olive Brown, Norman Hayes and Maggie Blenc. Throughout Aug.

### O THEATRE (947 215735)

*No Name...* No Pops Drill by Bob Herbert, director, Doreen Warburton. Most produced Australian play this year — nostalgic evocation of wartime Sydney. Bankstown Aug 3-6, Orange Aug 26-29.

### STUDIO SYDNEY (358 6096)

*Norm and Ahmed* by Alexander Buzo, director, Alexander Buzo, with Peter Carmody and Monique Remens. *The Death of Minnie* by Barry Hopkins,

director, Lisa Peans, with Laika Blake Budd makes his directorial debut with his one-act play about Australian racism into Aug.

**SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY**  
(3524 4300)

Drama Theatre *SOH Lulu* adapted by Louis Nowra from Woodland's *Earth Spirit* and Pandora's *Box*, director, Jim Sharman, with Judy Davis, Kerry Walker, Brigid Burke, Iain Kaita, Malcolm Robertson and Ralph Gifford. Sharman's spectacular production has had mixed critical response. A rare opportunity to see this once shocking German Expressionist piece. To Aug 29.

Theatre Royal - Chicago by Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse, director, Richard Wherrett, musical director, Peter Casey, with Nancy Hayes, Caroline Turner, Terry Donovan, Judi Connell, George Spanias and J P Webster. Sell-out success production of this Broadway musical about corruption and the media in the thirties. To Aug 29. For further contact Carole Long on 337 1200/909 3010.

**OLD HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE** (321 2777)  
*Whose Life is it Anyway?* by Brian Clarke, director, Brian Hewitt, with Robert Colley. Tragi-comedy about quadriplegia finishing its outland national tour. To Aug 15.

Marsel Mercedes. The legendary international mime artist returns to Australia for another sell-out tour. Aug 17-22.



**LA BOITE THEATRE** (38 1622)  
*Wings* by Arthur Kopit, director, David Ball. Fascinating play about an aviator who learns to cope with the speech disorder aphasia. To Aug 15.

The *Cramp* Written by Cezayirli Morvid, director, Malcolm Blacklock. A moving play about women with a conscience in Hitler's Germany. Aug 21-Sept 12.

**QUEENSLAND THEATRE COMPANY**  
(321 3601)

SGIO Theatre: *I Sent A Letter To My Love* by Dennis Robbins, director, Kevin Palmer, designer, James Redwood and Graham Maclean. Beautifully crafted play set in Wales about the unrequited search for love of a middle-aged spinster and her crippled bachelor brother. Aug 21-Sept 6.

Edward Street Theatre: *Upstairs Down At The Bottom Of The World* by David Allen, director, Robert Chuter. Drama-

location of D H Lawrence's time in Australia, based on Kangaroo. GTC's second alternative Tent production. To Aug 8.

**THE TN COMPANY** (352 5133)  
Schofield Theatre. Starred by Malcolm Clark and Johnny Rush, director, Sean



Meat. Designer, David Bell. Company devised rock musical, following the Shakespeare adaptation *Star in Fantasy*. Aug 20-Sept 5.

**TOWNSVILLE CIVIC THEATRE**  
(72 2677)  
The Dresser by Ronald Harwood, director, Rodney Fisher, with Warren Mitchell and Gordon Chater. Superb performances from Mitchell and Chater in this popular drama of back-stage WW2 rep theatre and its characters. Aug 17-22.

Traveling North by David Williamson. Some say Williamson's best play — about love in old-age and city/country differences. Aug 24-26.

For further contact Jeremy Rodgman on 377 2319.

**VICTORIA**  
**ANTHILL THEATRE** (888 3333)  
Enslaved by Alex Miller, director, Jean Pierre Mignon. Premier. Portrays social welfare as warfare and the caring professions as society's frontline of defense against the poor. To Aug 2.

The Madman and the Nun by Stanislaw Wislowski, director, Nicholas Teboul. To Aug 15.

School holiday matinee: *You're A Good Man Charlie Brown* by Charles Schulz. Musical dramatization of his cartoon strip. Aug 25-Sept 5.

The Jack and Jill Story, written and directed by Paul Adkin. Aug 26-Sept 13.

Holiday workshops conducted by Liz Stevenson.

**AUSTRALIAN PERFORMING GROUP**  
(347 7133)  
*Bold Tales* by Peter King. Adapted from short stories by Frank Macpherson and Peter Carey. To Aug 15.

The Clown Theatre Kids Show, each Saturday at 2.00pm throughout Aug. Sunday Play Readings. Back Theatre, 2.00pm.

The Disciple by Elizabeth Jolley, Aug 2.

L. Emigrate by Bill Hennis, Aug 9.

**COMEDY THEATRE** (862 3333)  
The Dresser by Ronald Harwood, director, Rodney Fisher, with Gordon Chater, Jennifer Hagen, Warren Mitchell and Ruth Cracknell. Excellent performances from Mitchell and Chater in the backstage look at WW2 rep

theatre and its characters. To Aug 22.

**COMEDY CAFE THEATRE RESTAURANT** (415 2853)  
*Dr Cloth the Most Intelligent Man in the World* plus *The Theresa O'Reilly Expedition*, devised and directed by Mitchell Faircloth, Terry Harvey and David Sheppard. Throughout Aug.

**LA MAMA THEATRE** (347 6046)  
*Never Unlatched* and *The Covenant of the Rainbow*, written and directed by Roger Pulvers, with Howard Stanley, Nina Landa, Lisa Armitage, Peter Hosking and Adrian Vandenberg. Aug 6-23.

The Teller by James Cloydon. Aug 27-Sept 13.

**LAST LAUGH THEATRE RESTAURANT** (419 8238)  
Downstairs. *Background Snaps*, director, Terry O'Connell. With Mick Conway. Throughout Aug. A night of song, dance and puppetry.

Upstairs. Late night shows changing weekly.

**MELBOURNE THEATRE COMPANY**  
(834 4860)  
Anthensium Theatre. *The Good Person of Szechuan* by Bertolt Brecht, director, Bruce Miles, designer, Richard Pinn. A major Brecht to which he had to add a code explaining that the play was not saying the only capitalist works. To Aug 22.

London Cuckolds by Edward Ravenscroft, director, Simon Chivers, designer, Alan Lees.

A rotating Restoration farce first produced in 1682 and revised annually for nearly a century.

Russell Street Theatre. *The Suicide* by Nikolai Erdman, director, Judith Alexander, designer, Paul Kethner, with Graeme Blundell. Newly revised Russian comedy of the thirties about pressure groups trying to use a man's suicide note as propaganda. Aug 5-Sept 28.

Athenaeum 2. *Antigone* by Sophocles, director, Steve Agnew, designer, Mark Wager. Throughout Aug.

Crystal Develops in Cabaret at the Hume Inn. Until Aug 6.



**PLAYBOX THEATRE COMPANY**  
(83 4034)  
Downstairs. *Farewell Brabantia* ladies by Doran Clarke, director, Kevin Palmer, with Monica Maughan and Maggie Kirkpatrick. Set design, Sue Russell. Comedy about marriage between two ageing "ladies of the night" by SA's state company. To Aug 2.

**True West** by Sam Shepard, director, Rex Crampthorn, with David Carleton and Peter Cummins. Design, Eamon d'Arcey. Australian premiere of Shepard's latest. Separate work about the confrontation of two brothers, which represents the true West? Aug 19-Sept 6

**Upstairs. The Golden Goldenbergs and The Interrogation of Angel**, two one act plays by Barry Delins, director, William Gluth, designer, Sandra Marlock. Delicous, irreverent expose of family life and a journey of self-discovery. Aug 6-Sept 13

**TASMANIA**  
**POLYGON THEATRE (002 34 8018)**  
Scenarists by Edward Albee, director, Don Gay, with Hazel Alger, Norreen Le Mottee, Allen Harvey and Don Gay. A modern comedy about evolution. In rehearsal during Aug.

**SALAMANCA (002 33 5258)**  
Three devised by company members, director, Les Wimpsey, with Richard Lawrence, Mark Bromlow. A look at 1968

**Amore's Coming Out** by Richard Meredith, director, Richard Dawey, with Jude McHenry, Fiona Stewart and Mary McManis

**THEATRE ROYAL (002 34 5256)**  
Phone theatre for details  
For entries contact Ely Ramal on 02 23 1818

**S.A.**  
**THE STAGE COMPANY**  
Space Theatre: *Cymba*, a musical by

Paul Harries and Ian Owens, director, Brian Debnam, musical director, Michael Morley. In a cabaret setting. To Aug 8

**STATE THEATRE COMPANY (31 5151)**  
**Magpie Theatre**. Currently playing schools throughout the state.  
**One Up My Sister** (primary) a play about mathematics  
**Hey Mum, I Own A Factory!** (secondary) a play about women in the workforce

**Playhouse Theatre: Squirts**, a political revue by Doreen Clarke, John Romani, Stephen Sewell, Jack Hibbard, Patrick Cook, Tim Robertson, Barry Oakley and others, director, Neil Armfield, designer, Stephen Curtis, lighting, Nigel Lewings. Aug 7-28. The show looks at games played in the world of power politics in general and the Liberal Party in particular, featuring grotesque and outrageous performances from Max Gilies, Evelyn Kraps.

**TROUPE THEATRE (271 7552)**  
**Oxford St. Urley. Anne's Coming Out** by Ron Hoernig, director, Peter Cunn. Based on book by Rosemary Crossley and Anne MacDonald about the problems of the handicapped. To Aug 22  
For entries contact Edwin Hall on 267 5888

**W.A.**  
**WAYMAN THEATRE WAIT (350 7026)**  
Tom Delger and the Sprouts of Spröben by Tony Nichols. Science fiction play for the blind. Aug 23-25

**HOLE IN THE WALL (361 3403)**  
Travlers by Stephen Sewell, director, Edgar Melick, with Gillian Lomborg, Andy King and Anna Piper. Powerful drama about personal and political conflict set in Russia. Aug 13-Sept 5  
**NATIONAL THEATRE COMPANY (325 3500)**  
**Playhouse: Pygmalion** by G.B. Shaw, director, David Addenbrooks, sets, Tony Trapp. The original script for *My Fair Lady* — a Shavian masterpiece of wit and social comment. Aug 18-Sept 12



**PERTH ACTORS COMPANY (389 2441)**  
**Dolphin Theatre: The Glass Menagerie** by Tennessee Williams, director, Mel Davis, designer, Henry Gaten, with Paul English, Anne Spender, Elizabeth Cassock, Martin Daxson. Strong personal drama as well as Williams' metaphor for between the wars America. To Aug 15

**WINTER THEATRE (335 5444)**  
**Princess May Theatre: The Girl Who Lived On Venus Street** by Wanda Davidson and Ross Cole, music, Denise Follington. An original musical about a prostitute who dreams of following in the footsteps of her idol — a successful nightclub singer.  
For entries contact Margaret Scheer on 241 1178

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The result, in the words of the drama critic of the *Melbourne Herald*, is "a play of entertaining substance, that connects pungently with its audience as it pulls Australian threads apart". With dialogue "that crackles and throws off sparks" (*The Australian*)

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# WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

## **STEPPING OUT**

First Prize, 6th Annual Dance and Film Festival New York, April 1981 Jury Prize, Oberhausen Festival for Short Films, May 1981

## **WATERLOO**

Best Documentary, Sydney Film Festival, 1981

## **FRONT LINE**

Nominated for Best Documentary Feature 1981 Annual Academy Awards

## **PUBLIC ENEMY NUMBER ONE**

Rouben Mamoulian Award, Greater Union Awards, Sydney Film Festival, June 1981.  
Joint First Prize, International Studies Category, American Film Festival, 1981

## **MEATHEADS**

Fiction Award, Greater Union Awards, Sydney Film Festival, June 1981

## **CLIMBERS**

Silver Plaque, Chicago International Dance Film Festival, 1980

## **WORKING UP**

Silver Plaque, Chicago International Film Festival, 1980

## **PINS AND NEEDLES**

Certificate of Merit, Chicago International Film Festival, 1980

## **PATRICK**

Best Foreign Film, Academy of Science Fiction and Fantasy and Horror Film Awards 1981

## **HARLEQUIN**

Critics Prize, Special Prize and Best Actor (Robert Powell), 10th Paris International Festival of Science Fiction and Fantasy Films

Best Screenplay, Best Cinematography and Critics Award, International Festival of Fantastic and Horror Films — SITOES 1980

## **BREAKER MORANT**

Nomination, Best Screenplay adapted from another source, 53rd Annual Academy Awards 1981  
1981, Nominated Best Foreign Film, Golden Globe Awards  
Jack Thompson, Best Actor, Capetown Film Festival 1981

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NORTH SYDNEY 2060 Telephone 922-8855.



# INFO FILM

By Elizabeth Sittell

## LEADING LADIES

The busiest girls on the business are Judy Davis and Angela Punch McGreger who, as I write, but by the time you read they may be into double figures — have finished, or are making, *The Winter of Our Dreams*, *Maratona*, *Headlock*, *We of the Never Never*, *The Best of Friends* and *Double Deal*. Wendy Hughes is in competition with *A Burning Man* and *Porter*. When I telephoned Errol Sullivan about *The Killing of Angel Sore* he said, "It's the film that doesn't have Judy Davis or Angela Punch McGreger in it." What it does have is Elizabeth Alexander.



Angela Punch McGreger

## MODERN MOVIE MAKING

There are some very clever young directors around just now. On a visit to a location the other day I heard a veteran actor moaning into his coffee mug. "If only they knew where the sun was going to be at any one time. Never mind, there is always a cameraman to tell them."

## WALL TO WALL

Talking of clever young directors, Mark Egerton who has been everybody's favourite assistant director for the past few years — he worked with Peter Weir and Gill Armstrong, to name two — is the director on *Wall to Wall*, a modern horror story very big on technology, and another from that trio of producers called Filmade (Errol Sullivan, Ross Matthews, Richard Newman) who have an office in Woodlawnwood.



Judy Davis. All smiles

## THE BURSTALLS

If you sometimes wonder how many Burstalls there are, the answer is three. Jim is the grand old man (if there is such a thing) as a GGM in the local industry apart from of course Ken Hall. Tom is his son who produces and/or directs and Dan is a cinematographer. Jim is directing *Knave*, based on the DH Lawrence novel about his brief visit to Australia. Gerni who is the first assistant director? Right Mark Egerton.

## BETT-BETT RETURNS

It was a long shoot, and sometimes uncomfortable, for the crew and cast of *We of the Never Never Things* — tempera, anyway — improved when the real patient arrived at Maratona, taking seven days on the journey to Darwin. Ken Franks, who is a consultant to Adams Peckel films, found Bett-Bett, the little black girl of Mrs. Aeneas Gerni's story. Bett-Bett is now a 90 year old lady (looking 70, Ken says) living at Humpty Doo near Darwin. When Mr Aeneas Gerni died she was only eight. Her father, a seaman (in of Liverpool), went to the station, picked her up and took her to Darwin where he placed her with a foster mother. She had never been back until Ken arranged for her to pay a visit during filming.

## STARS FOR STARSTRUCK

By the time you read this *Wall To Wall* produced by Errol Sullivan and Ross Matthews) will be at the editing stage and *Survival* will be half shot, if you will excuse the expression. Stephen Mathias (pronounced as in *clean*) is the motivating

source here as the originator of the idea, the scriptwriter and an executive producer. The film is a rock musical, for and about young people, and largely by them. Stars may emerge, but in any case it has a solid array of designers and crew. Russell Boyd, Luciana Arrighi, Brian Thomson, Brian Bangrove, Cameron Allan. Costumes by Melissa White, and Gillian Armstrong directs.



Judy Davis

## REORGANISATION REQUIRED

Will it happen again? Last year a bunch of films hit the screens at the same time (late July) in order to qualify for inclusion in the Australian Film Awards. Some that might otherwise have done well got lost in the crush and were never seriously seen again. Another thing this time of the year is commercially dead — Federal Budget time, winter and general gloom not conducive to leaving the house and the television set for the cinema. It should not be beyond the capacity of the industry to reorganise itself.

## THE FILM



**The Lake and Forest of Mount the Ararat  
Pharmaceuticals Park**



Journal of Management Inquiry 22(1) 3-16

— reflecting poor production quality

Dr. Elizabeth Mitchell

For anyone who is not contented in seeing everything that the Film Festival offers in Rimini and Melbourne, here on offer for two weeks every day in the hours between 9am and midnight, a good deal depends on luck. That is, the films you can arrange to see without sacrificing your entire business and social life may be all that you most want of everything that you could most easily do without. The two festivals just described run up to a theme — and why should they? — and there have been some complaints in both cases about the quality. But not there always? It may be that the festivals are simply reflecting a couple of years of poor quality production. *continues*

I have to say that I was lucky, in that I was able to catch *The Red Rover*—*More On the Edge of Obscurity*. Sitting Ducks (which if any exhibitor is smart enough to pick up will fill two screens for a week and a week and a week, programmed the right way). *The Trials of Alger Hiss*, *The Handmaid* (I assume a *Four Star*) *Der Fischer* (The *Fumery*) and *Weeks*, and among the shorts *Karen Almquist*, *Marvellous Planning* (A *Go Screened*) *Rum Rouser* *Carry On, Jones*.

*Man in Paradise*, Making Worked of  
Swimmer Last (which should be seen by  
every Australian producer-director scen-  
earist) and *Rollabout* is brilliant.

I don't think the average Festival audience is there to catch an annual pay-off, though attention is the often expensively stalked shorts, which run as three or five or 15 minutes, what many delegates fail to get across in one and a half murky hours. I wonder would a whole morning or afternoon of shorts, have its own special attraction?

This year there were 88 films labelled New Cinema in metaphorical brackets. "Immortal," a word that has escaped from the planners' world of fiction. Several films in this category had been shown earlier at the Edinburgh Festival. Probably the weirdest was Peter Greenaway's *The Fall*, from Britain on videotape, which can last 183 minutes. In Greenaway's own words, "This is an investigation into a mythology. An ideal history of the world is most perfectly told by a history of all its subjects." This being manifestly impossible, Greenaway posted 82 screensmen beginning with the letters FALL, out of 19 million over histories of nations of the Venerable Unknown East or VUE. About 100 screens after the film started we went out for a cup of coffee to remove our flagging spirits, and did not return. Nevertheless, *The Fall* is a solid item in a Festival program, so don't let's knock it.

Also in the new volume series are: The

*Life and Times of Rosie the Riveter*, made by the talented Connie Field, which recounts a section of women's history in the US when women were called from the home front and busy mending to work in industry with the slogan **DO THE JOB WE LEFT BEHIND**. They were dumped unceremoniously when the war ended and the boys came home to take back the jobs. Rosie is spirited, snail and will surely get a screening in selected local cinemas. Others of these films that the public may expect to see include *After Miss. Moon*, *Circle of Strangers*, *Muskrat*, *The Assassination*, *The Assassins* as well as *Saving Mr. Tunn*.

*Heath* is an extremely entertaining film by Robert Altman, where *Apocalypse* is being shown commercially throughout the country. It was interesting to compare its brilliant rhythms with his heavy-footed *Shogun* shown as part of the interval retrospective section. Altman was always not money to make films, and he seems

but he cannot gain acceptance at the box office. Of the five features he produced and directed between 1977 and 1979 for 20th Century Fox, *A Perfect Couple* was watched by all and *Quiero* got a limited release (none of all in Australia) while *Heath* has had no release in any 15 nations and none in Europe. In last German films review do well in Australia, and the includes *Heath*. *Quiero* may break the pattern of non-acceptance. *Heath* is a satire on presidential elections. It is set in St. Petersburg, Florida, a not-so-secure



# FESTIVALS



Jessica Tandy in *On the Turn of His Mind* National Film



David Strathairn and Gloria Swanson in *Health* National Film

centre with hotels of 1930s architectural extravagance. It purports to cover the election of a new president to the organization simply called Health, the two candidates being Laurence Beral as dairy, spread-eat Father Bill and Gloria Jackson as super-porn Isabella Garret who is so afraid of addiction to sex or coffee that she drinks hot water only, fresh from the kettle. Apart from these two Altman has co-opted many of his old team.

Henry Gibson, Paul Dooley, Carol Burnett (al. *Norfolk*) and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* James Garner appears as a hustler and Dick Cavett, Walter Cronkite and Dench Searle as themselves. It is a deeply satisfying spoof of the kind of hype that America understands so well and which is becoming part of the Australian scene.

There is one aspect of the Sydney Film Festival that must disturb its admirers and participants, and that is opening night last year's *The Fog* was bad enough, but this year's opening program of a reconstructed 1927 film, *For The Term Of His Natural Life* and *Epis*, a film about the reconstruction of this film together with the Greater Union Awards presentation and some speeches failed to instil a sense of joyful anticipation into the audience whose members had, apart from honored guests and the media, paid for their seats. *For The Term Of His Natural Life* was directed by an American, Norman Dawn whose professional career became somehow conflated in the minds of Australian

producers with that of Allan Dwan, a celebrated director of the Hollywood era which included Gloria Swanson. The National Film Archive of the National Library in Canberra took on the task of seeking surviving bits and pieces of the film together. Some of the bits were in Australia, some of them in the US. It was probably natural for them to then make a film about the restoration and they did. But it was unfortunate that on opening night the audience was promised not only with the film, which as a piece of its master's oeuvre is pretty heavy going, but with the second film which included large chunks of the first. There was a rather shamefully bizarre appearance by Jessica Haysourt, who was featured in *PTTDWNE*, but in general proceedings were repetitive to the point of boredom, and those members of the audience who did not bother to conceal their feelings did so, and keep on saying so.

There must be a way out of the dilemma of opening nights and I am sure the director David Strathairn, often lauded but much admired, will find it.

I should make a special mention here of the premier Canadian film *The Handmaid* directed by Michelanne Landau, an actress and painter. The Canadian product is interesting to us because the Australian industry finds itself in much the same bind, wanting to make films that will interest the world but afraid of the international trap.

In the late 1970s the Canadian government enacted the Capital Cost Allowance for Certain Canadian Features, for which read the Commonwealth. Tremor's exhibited together tax concessions. American distributors were set this summer, Canadian papers reported, to launch 25 Canadian films. *The Handmaid*, like *The Traveller* in last year's festival, can be seen as easily Canadian in treatment, yet of universal human interest.

The handyperson in question is a dapper French Canadian called Armand who leaves the Grosse region of Quebec province for Quebec city and then Montreal in search of work, travelling with his bluebird friend, a capricious Armand has no luck with women or only transient luck, until he gets to work for Therese, with whom he starts a love affair at once salty and delicate. The film is a comedy of character and non-shattering scenes of disappointments and small pleasures, a vehicle for the low-key playing of Jocelyne Berube, who turned to acting from English-style singing.

Some big companies in the US have announced that they will no longer be making the small "quality" picture (\$2 million to \$4 million budget) because (the argument goes) they will then have to spend the same amount on promoting it and that's too much to spend on a low budget movie. Canada hopes to take up some of the slack and so probably will Australia.

# AUS SHORTS



Waterloo — a scene of the documentary on the day of the Greater Union Awards

## getting a lot of things right

I don't think it can be denied that the short Australian films which compete for the Greater Union Organisation Awards and the Rouben Mamoulian Award, and which lead off the Film Festival, get better every year. That is, they are more technically competent, the directors, lighting experts, editors and sound people have maximised their capacity for getting the performance and the machinery in the right direction. But this does not imply that the product is necessarily more stimulating, encompassing or informative than it was last year or the year before. While getting a lot of things right, film makers may omit the essentials such as creative imagination, a fresh view, a challenging concept.

The passing years do not, indeed, seem so basic modified many film makers' determination to preach at their audience, which may well from time to time prefer to be judged in the ribs rather than a thing over the ear.

As usual, I did not agree with the judges verdict, except in the case of *Public Enemy Number One*, the film by David Broadbent about Wilfred Burchett which took out the Mamoulian and should have got the award for the documentary. The one thing wrong with *Enemy* is that Broadbent failed to bring from Burchett an admission that some of his ideas had, and have, less of clay. In any case it is rather a relief to find Burchett said but not otherwise, unlike others who have backed the wrong horse.

The judges this year in the documentary section were Barbara Cholewicki, Steve Crofts and Sue Murray. In the general

section, Tim Cowie, Geoff Gardner and Barbara Crofts, in the fiction category, Anne Brooksbank, Rex Cramphorn and David Ellis, the rest of them representing various branches of the industry.

*Waterloo* by Tom Zubrycki came first in the documentary section. It's a short but of *Dust to Dust*, *Providence* and the infamous *Public Enemy Number One*. *Waterloo* is a long, confused, but then the situation was confused, over several years — account of demolition and development, bureaucracy and plan people, in an inner-city Sydney suburb. The director marshalled a lot of people awkwardly to take an individual stance before the camera but failed to give any impression of concerted action or purpose. Maybe there wasn't any. Zubrycki fell into the same trap as did Selma Wyren with her *Dust to Dust*. In other words both produced radio with pictures, talking heads against urban or rural backdrops.

*Providence*, 26 minutes produced, scripted and directed by Beth McKay, was again talking heads, women who had been raped, discussing what happened to them and how they felt about it. Film added nothing to the horrendous story, except in a few instances.

In the general category the eight minute film *Gauguin* with four directors Alexander Popkin, Sakh Shermenev, Tony Vaccaro and Norman Nelson — photographed only by Popkin — closed boss and bowly and bristles from an audience of its peers. It was the award in rather strange company — a negligible two-minute item called *Cocktail Caper* that was so like an actual Friday night was bar act that it could scarcely be called a parody, the work of Paul Schneider, a disgusting 25 minute wallow with live and dead animals by the Taschereau/Ivor Duncan called *Self*

*Portrait*, *Blood Red* involving what environmental destruction and a 30 minute far too long, bludgily clever cartoon in colour augmentation by Paul Winkler.

The black party, or any party where young men predominate, occupies a secure place in the Australian mythology, so I suppose it is no surprise to find that *Washbrook* (18 minutes, Wayne Moore Productions) won first place in the fiction category. It was produced, directed and scripted by Wayne Moore and altered the usual thick necked workers, the time butchers, giving them more a snuff-off into matrimony. There is a hint to the interest to be derived from repetitive jokes and, or about I might have given the award to *Rockies* a 25 minute fantasy about a man's ascent to death doyley, edited and scripted by Len Lang and acted out by Robin Cumming, Amanda Ma, Alan Hoggood and Steve Mitchell for his attempts at fantasy, or indeed to *Love*, a film about the way some people — two urban adolescents and their manager, a cab driver, a baby young man — behaved on the day that Sir John Kerr sailed Gough Whitlam from government. The principals of *Love* who are obviously going to do better, were Pat Laughren, Paul Davies, Carolyn Howard and the photographer, Paul Dwyer.



Wilfred Burchett in *Public Enemy No. 1*

The other competitor in this section was *Arakid*, an animated film about an Aboriginal and a kangaroo, displaced persons. It was funny, in a lovely, coarse way.

The institutions which led to the production of these films were the Australian Film and Television School, three, Creative Development Branch of the Australian Film Commission, three, The Southwestern Institute of Technology, two, Women's Co-ordination Unit, NSW Premier's parliament, one.

# GUIDE FILM

## Pick of the flicks

### WATCH FOR THESE...

A short list of films of more than usual interest, currently showing around Australia.

**THE COALMINER'S DAUGHTER** with Susy Spack and Tommy Lee Jones, both impressively cast. She got the best actress Oscar for her role as country-and-western singer.

**THE ELEPHANT MAN**, a real surprise and not a bit frightening about deformed John Merrick who found friends and life away from a Victorian freakshow. John Hurt, Anthony Hopkins.

**BREAKER MORANT**, Bruce Beresford's version of the non-hero who fought in the Boer War and paid for his own and others' sins. Edward Woodward, Bryan Brown, Jack Thompson, all fine.



Jack Thompson and Rod Mullinar in *Breaker Morant*

**THE STUNT MAN** is a sparkling piece of show-off by Peter O'Toole and others, in a story you will be hard put to follow. Well worth a try.

**ORDINARY PEOPLE**, directed by Robert Redford with Mary Tyler Moore and Donald Sutherland and, best of all, Timothy Hutton as their son. You may argue against the psychology but not the direction or performance.

**THE LAST METRO** has Catherine Deneuve and Gerard Philipeau semi-undergrounded in German-occupied Paris, running a theatre and a love affair, directed by Franois Truffaut, whose *The New Woman* is also well worth catching.

**KAGEMUSHA**, by the Japanese master Kurosawa, in Japanese with English subtitles. The story of a look-alike duo of two 16th century imperial brothers, and how not to put your trust in pictures. Pure cavalry. Kurosawa's seamless deployment of what seems like thousands of extras, colour, sound, violent death, even some humour.



Bruce Beresford and William Hurt in *Altered States*

**SISTERS**, by the German woman director Margarethe von Trotta, is a poignant but never gloomy or morose story of two sisters and a third girl living in the shadow of big business and ambience. 1988. Roman Polanski chose Nastassia Kinski, 17-year-old daughter of a German actor, to play the Hardy heroine. It may not be Hardy, but it's fascinating, and beautiful to look at.

**THE MARRIAGE OF MARIA BRAUN** was the pride of the film festivals before the last. Fassbinder's story has everything to turn you on, including a believable plot and the best blonde German star since Dietrich.



Nigel Terry as the Young Arthur in *Excalibur*



Jack Nicholson and Jessica Lange in *The Postman Always Rings Twice*

**THE POSTMAN ALWAYS RINGS TWICE** is an example of a film that, by being as explicit as custom allows, loses something of the erotic mystique. Lene Terner and John Garfield were actually more exciting in the roles than are Hope Lange and Jack Nicholson. All the same, worth seeing as a good example of depression drama.

**ALTERED STATES**. An unlikely collaboration between Paddy Chayevsky, the writer, and Ron Russell (the *Barbary Coast* director). It has some very scary bits and some unintentionally funny bits, and a star from the stage, William Hurt.

**EXCALIBUR**: one knight is armour looks much like another, and Basil Williamson talks a lot of gibberish as the magician Merlin, but there are some spectacular scenes of bloodletting and some great scenery. Made by John Boorman, of *Deliverance*.

# INTO OPERA

## NSW FRIENDS — GLOOMY FUTURE

The future of the NSW Friends of the Australian Opera seems gloomy. The recent resignation of the Executive Officer, Ian Mackerras, has been followed by the laying off of the two remaining staff members. Only external commitments wait, it seems, be maintained for the balance of this year.

It was no secret that in recent years the Friends, established in 1930 to assist the company, had been in difficulties and had become, in fact, a drain rather than a prop for The Australian Opera. On the other hand, the company's recent report identifies no fewer than eight good seasons in the period 1971 to 1980 which had been sponsored by the support body.

## FUTURE SHOCK — TV AND OPERA

Last month a seminar in Melbourne on televising the live performing arts, especially opera, brought together a group of experts and interested organisations from all over Australia and New Zealand. Based around the visit to Australia of Michael Brownson, Media Director of New York's Metropolitan Opera who has been responsible for that company's extensive television programme, the seminar was conducted at the premises of the Victoria State Opera by the Opera Conference with the financial assistance of the Music Board.

Representatives of the ABC opera, theatre and dance companies, CAPPA, Musica Viva, Television New Zealand and major performing arts centres around the country heard Mr Brownson lead discussion on a wide range of issues related to the transfer of the product from the stage to the screen. Sessions dealt with such matters as the relative roles of the

producing body and the television company, the 'future shock' of new media technologies and industrial implications of television opera.

Seminar participants came away with much to ponder in the proposed marriage between opera and television which Patrick Vaneck, new GM of The Australian Opera has made such a publicly important plank of his policy for the future development of the company.



Jacqueline Siebel

## GLOBE ARISES WITH CAV/PAG

Globe Opera in Melbourne seems suddenly to have arisen from a long sleep. A recent production of *Caravan* starring Suzanne Steele seems to have heralded the change. Until then, this essentially amateur-based body had skittered around the fringes of operatic activity in Melbourne, a city which already hosts major seasons each year from both the Victoria State Opera and The Australian Opera.

An injection of experienced professionals appears to be providing much of the new impetus for the group which will be tested again in a season of the war horse, double-bill *Caroline, or Change* and *I Pagliacci* opening in August 28 with Ronald O'Neil, Maureen Howard and, again, Suzanne Steele, in leading roles.

## IMAGINATIVE FUND-RAISING

One of the most imaginative arts fund raising ideas to emerge in some time was The Australian Opera's ICI Collection. This was a series of limited edition lithographs taken from original artwork commissioned from leading Australian painters on subjects in the company's repertoire. So far four have appeared by luminaries such as Fred Williams (*The Mags Flare*), Leonard French (*Bara Goleenoo*) and Charles Blackman (*A Midwinter Night's Dream*).

Essentially, the upfront costs of the operation were borne by ICI with the opera taking the surplus profits.

Now they have added a new string to their bow. This time it's not a lithograph but limited edition numbered photographic reproductions of a work by the late Sir William Dobell entitled *Sydney Opera House, 1969* (during the construction stages, of course). Like the ICI Collection, everyone, including collectors, benefits and the opera gets the profits. It has much to recommend it over the 'monstrous order' style of fund raising.

## VSO — PURSUING YOUTH

Despite its many ups and downs over of Victorian State Opera's most consistent policies has been the maintenance of its touring operas for school children. The programme is now in its ninth consecutive year and has been marked throughout by a vigorous policy of commissioning new works for classroom presentation. 1981 has seen a new piece by Melbourne composer Peter Narrows, *The Dragon and the Mandarin* which has been on the road since the beginning of June and has



*The Dragon and the Mandarin* — VSO visiting to three girls

also had some highly successful public presentation outside of schools.

A departure from the previous format of touring operas is the fact that the cast play a variety of authentic Chinese percussion instruments. These instruments have been obtained on behalf of the VSO by the Australia-China Council.

As the debate continues as to how best to introduce children to the conventions of opera and music theatre when the sheer cost of the real thing prevents most children from attending many house seasons, it is good to see the Victorians sticking to their guns. Whatever that debate involves, there can be little doubt that the especially written touring works are greatly to be preferred to the scaled-down versions of full works which land nowhere.



AG GM PAMEL PUGH



At the Merry Widow — more feathers than Las Vegas

## MORE FEATHERS THAN LAS VEGAS

by Justin Macdonnell

**If opera is, at its best and by wide consensus, the supreme amalgam of the most dynamic elements in the theatre arts, why is production of it frequently so appalling?**

Opera one could, for example, mention *Lena, Wozzeck, Mahagonny, Katia Kabanova, The Rape of Lucretia* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The Same Opera of South Australia, especially during the Adelaide Festival, has shown theatrical insight in its coolly elegant production of *Death in Venice* and, earlier, in the laser design for *The Excursions of Mr Browicz*. In the ongoing music theatre seasons of the Victoria State Opera and in their *Pelléas and Mélisande* or the glacial simplicity of *La Clemenza di Tito* a tendency to break out of the often self-

imposed production straightjacket was discernible.

Looking at the above list, it is frightening to realise that they are almost all works of the 20th century. It is as though decisions about production and the resulting clarification for a modern audience were necessary only when the musical material itself is unfamiliar. Is it attributable to boredom with the inherited repertoire or a failure of nerve that we are hardly ever treated to other than few square conventionalities except when the works themselves are "new"?

Let us hope that the days are gone when in order to be "relevant" producers felt the urge to produce *The Ring* in plastic bags, to set *The Merchant of Venice* anywhere but in 16th century Italy or had chairs to the ceiling in order to acquire "a new perspective". *The Marriage of Figaro*,

The production of opera in Australia has not, in the main, been responsive to the major theatrical and artistic influences that have coursed the world this century and remains sadly locked into a phase of "utopian" decoration belonging, generally, to no discernible period of artistic endeavour and certainly to no known schools of thought — except perhaps to the absence of thought. Meanwhile, managements have by and large meekly accepted the role of curators and resigned themselves to fighting rising costs.

In the recent history of opera production here there have, of course, been individual exceptions from the various companies which if they have not exactly broken new ground, have provided some evidence that in developing an attitude to the works in hand, somebody, somewhere was at least thinking. Of The Australian

for example, requires working doors in plausible walls of its internal dramatic demands are to be met. But could they not, for a change, be in a Spanish nobleman's villa rather than in a Viennese palace? Is it necessary for Rodolfo and Marcello to occupy a garret the size of Versailles?

Take the latter case. A distinguished British opera producer has been heard to say that the Bohemians should not obviously possess any object which they might reasonably already have sold or pawned. Not a bad starting point for a piece whose mainpining is poverty. If one hasn't considered the questions of kingship and power and how families and individuals contend for it, it is a poor beginning for *Orfeo* or *Macbeth*.

And yet one has seen endless productions of these very pieces and wondered if anyone has thought at all.

If Price Hall can produce a *Figure* in which every nuance of social behaviour, age and sex relations and class distinction is observed — strictly within the musical context — and where decoration is present to clarify these matters and not simply because the designer likes the period, it is clearly possible. If John Cox's production of the not easily handled *Pastorale* is successful, it is because there is a body of opinion musically and dramatically at work in which an artistic movement and a school of painting and the plastic arts are used superbly well to point the action and the theatre. Mushinsky's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* provides another incoincident example of a keen theatrical intelligence stripping down a work and adding what is necessary and useful — as well as beautiful — but in the cause of the opera and not merely for its own sake.

Observing the many lumbering production monstrosities around one is forced to wonder whether honestly presented, well-in, well sung and musically sound concert versions in which the performer and performance can appear with dignity might not be preferable.

Again one is not suggesting that the unique theatrical experience of opera should be abandoned in favour of concert series, but confronted with the flashy, third-rate ideas permeating so many productions one needs seriously to question what is wrong when it so



F&O La Clemenza di Tito — glorious simplicity

patently need not be wrong and when there is abundant evidence that it is possible to get it right — at no greater financial cost.

In the dramatic action of *Macbeth* — surely one of the least naturalistically inclined of works (whether it be Shakespeare or Verdi) genuinely clearer for being buried under kilos of fur?

In Dame Joan Sutherland a greater artist (or even a happier woman) secure in the knowledge that her hat may have more feathers than there are in Las Vegas? Or Miss Zechau for having the longest tract of any Tosca in history?

I have yet to meet a singer who believed that *more* clothing was conducive to a better exercising of his or her art.

These are, perhaps, but minor sins or lapses in taste and concern but, when some of the greatest masterpieces in any theatrical medium are produced in so ineffectually threadbare a fashion often in a variety of lute or Teutonic gibberish that all sense goes quite out the window, when time after time producers and designers have been led (by a failure of confidence in the product potentially) to another many a revised unknown work so that whatever intrinsic merit had led to that very revival is lost, when acknowledged but lesser masterpieces of operatic art are peddled to gargantuan proportions until they sink under the weight of misapplied interpolations and sheer meaningless cut, when, seemingly, every effort is made to interpose between the performers and their audience every barrier which money can buy to

rational artistic communication; when all too often the very function of the producer and designer to clarify the action for the audience has been twisted into quite the reverse, one can't help but think in the words of the popular song "There's got to be something better than this".

If it is a failure of nerve it is by no means confined in opera to this country nor in this country by any means to opera alone.

The same unwillingness to pursue the courage of these selections may be seen in the Sydney Theatre Company's lamentable Duckertian production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* or in the many lugubrious efforts of Nimrod with other works of Shakespeare spoken in spaghetti English or set on caravans.

Not that simplicity is necessarily cheaper or austere of production a financial saving. Equally abundance of detail and lavish hints of decor do not necessarily fail to communicate. Robert Holpmann's recent *Arcus*, which by his own admission isn't not a sequin in Sydney, was an excellent example of the use of boldly applied abundance to make a set of unfamiliar performance conventions blindingly clear to its audience.

But if the weight of externally applied physical circumstances were to be considered in its proper light as an aid to communication rather than an ordained necessity pandering to the lowest theatrical instincts of "dressing up" we might be a little further along the road to developing our critical faculties within opera and leaving fashion parades where they rightfully belong.

Surely an art form which absorbs over 4 million dollars of public money in Australia each year ought to regard its product with more seriousness and being to bear on that product a greater human and artistic perception.

Surely the largest theatrical organisation in the country, as The Australian Opera proudly, and rightly, proclaims itself, should be a leader in the field of theatrical communication and a pacesetter in developing skills of direction and design which would aid that communication rather than so frequently a slave to a performance tradition long dead in the rest of the theatre and inevitably dying in opera in many other parts of the world?

## Three great sopranos

by Ken Hensley

It is tempting to describe an unforgettable period of 24 hours towards the end of June as 'The Day of Three Sopranos', Carden, Sutherland, and Marilyn Zechau, in that order, had scored triumphs in Handel's *Alcina* in first performance. *La Traviata* in matinee, and *Tosca*. A little reflection, however, helps define the experience in terms of the span of opera over a period of nearly two centuries. From early eighteenth to early twentieth. More specifically, it was a study in development of emotion, which is particularly apt since exposure to these three operas in such rapid succession is an emotional experience not often available.

For Robert Helpmann's production of Handel's finest baroque opera comes just over twenty years after Zefferelli first tried to make it accessible to modern audiences by means of a stage within a stage: people of Handel's time were seen watching the members of antiquity as classically depicted in Antonio Orlando Furber. Helpmann's approach is more direct: first and foremost that of a dancer-choreographer. He and his designer John Pascoe have styled up the elegance of the early eighteenth century as a visual feast. Disappointingly, there are few spectacular stage machines (creating effects. In fact, some rather large rolling bellows, managed to creak disconcertingly during an otherwise magical vocal moment when Alcina sings slow and accompanied in the second act. Noise and unattractive smoke machines also dented the enchantment, but otherwise stage settings which gave an effect of once-in-a-lifetime and some helped launch a successful, if pregeable production.

To return to the presentation of emotion, the dominating effect of placing the story in classical stagey helps convey generalized, somewhat elevated emotion called up by a literary text. Singers regret the embodiment of evil (Alcina), heroism (Ruggiero), love (Bradamante), and wisdom (Melisso). Handel's long musical line perfectly expresses the carefully measured intensity of feeling heightened mainly in the sense of elevated. The singers are also, of course, required to be consummate technicians, and in this respect the opera was well served.

Jane Carden after an unremarkable beginning, rose to the demands of the aria 'Tornami a vagheggiar', in which Alcina expresses her need of Ruggiero. Thereafter the intensity of her singing was conveyed by a ravishing vocal line which



Margaret Elsom (Ruggiero) and Jane Carden (Alcina) in the 1973 *Alcina*. Photo: Brian Jones

set her above even the very high standard of Margaret Elsom and Heather Begg as the lovers, Ruggiero and Bradamante. And the impressive young Anne-Marie McDonald, whose Othello was flawless. Paul Furber showed that he well-focused lyric tenor is ideally suited to Handel's music (he was Orestes) but that fine actress Angela Denning sang Queen's lover, Margana, with a kind of in-built wall. Donald Shanks was a reliable Melisso, and the specially recruited chorus sang with style. A good deal of Helpmann's choreography was too firmly rooted in the nineteenth century for children, Richard Bonyngie's small hand complete with recorder, occasionally rose to moments of great beauty, but once lost as way momentarily during an aria.

Drama is generally recognised as the domain of heightened emotion. For me the high point in the romantic conception of that heightening occurs in Verdi's *La Traviata*. When I heard Kim To Kanaoka create the role of Violetta in this handsome production by John Copley in 1979, I knew that I should never lose the great first act showpiece 'Ah, Jene Jai, Sempere' more perfectly sung. Two years later Joan Sutherland was more effulgent (she now shapes her lips in the manner of lower cupresses in rapid coloratura passages, and has a hint of an edge on the tone at the top). But To Kanaoka's beautifully accented singing did not move me. Sutherland brought tears to my eyes and then lips; them coursing down my face.

Little wonder that with such a response in the mind of the three sopranos I should look back on them in terms of emotional communication. The vibrant production is well cast with Richard Grainger an ardent, intelligent Alfredo, and Jonathan Summers as ringing Victor as German, making sounds such as one imagines the young Alcinas may have made. Sutherland, too mature in age and too robust in stature to be in any



Joan Sutherland as Violetta in the 1979 *La Traviata*.

naturalistic sense a credible Marguerite Gautier, brings to Violetta an instrument of emotional communication not as debile in Dumas' play. Her singing, not just her voice in soprano in the ps. Richard Bonyngie elicited the lightest, most rhythmically supple Verdi playing during Act I that I have heard from him. Sutherland's song of his daughter in Act II with a simplicity which matched the music, bringing that scene of confrontation with Violetta to a pitch of sustained dramatic anguish that I never expect to see surpassed. The young baritone as older man successfully exploring the mature diva as consumptive girl encapsulated the genius of romantic opera, playing against type by musical means.

John Copley's production of *Tosca* belongs far to be the hit of the current Sydney season, and indeed of the Australian Opera's entire year. It deserves all the acclaim that comes its way. *Tosca* is displayed for what it is, a physically violent horror story, seen as though magnified. The brutal passions of individuals are ugly when compared with the washed romanticism of *La Traviata*, the treatment of evil in *Alcina* is a stylised world away. And this *Tosca* shows us why opera has had such a difficult time trying to find its way since 1900. Romantic love is tragically dated down with huge musical and dramatic blows. The operator's way ahead had to be away from realism in that in which direction?

That question is unlikely to occur to many during the totally capturing length of this production. Copley and musical director Cilliano supply the subtlety which constantly enhances the brute power of John Shaw's *Tosca*, the daring but hardly profound Fiona Tones of Marilyn Zechau, and the amazingly youthful, simple Caravados of Lamberie Furber. Since his first, petrified assumption of the role in 1970, Furber has improved greatly. But no one could have foretold the sudden advance in relaxation, credibility, presence



The 1970s French-inspired *Opéra de Sydney* and *Alma Fassi* (Photo: *British Opera*)

even, while his Des Grieux in Melbourne's *May Shaw* has never been a subtle performer, and his rapid tongue and murder of a Scarpia hardly exhausts the possibilities of the role. No matter. His battle with the delectable, formidable Zerkow is the finest piece of comic-operatic drama one is ever likely to encounter.

When on the battlements of Castel Sant'Angelo Tosca and Cavaradossi sing rapturously in unison duets, Proulx stops the orchestra for a few bars, and we celebrate human physiology expressing in a transport of love its triumph over the brutality of the previous act. And over the cruelty about to erupt on stage. This is not high and complex art: it is not even nodding the dramatic tradition onwards. But as a reminder of the beauty which this opera at its most earthy, there is nothing to rival it.

## State Opera's La Bohème

by Michael Morley

In a recent radio interview, John Copley suggested that, unlike, for example, *Tosca*, *Bohème* was almost production proof. It was clearly a wise decision on General Manager Ian Campbell's part to choose the work for his first venture into the dangerous arena of opera direction.

Some reviewers strongly suggested

earlier productions: others — like the search for the key before "Che gelida manina", the blocking of Act 3 and Mimi's death, were simply clumsy and unconvincing. Operatic conventions are all very well, but it's a bit difficult to accept two

characters, knowing in full view of themselves and the audience and habitually putting round the floor in search of a palpably visible key and hand?

On the other hand, the music and settings and gongs of Act 2 were well managed (perhaps and the deployment of large forces being the forte of general managers?). It was really the relationships between characters, the shifts from comedy to pathos, the ability to impose a vision on the melodramatic incidents that were lacking.

The major strength of the production was the singing and, in most cases, characterisation. The Bohémiens themselves were splendid individually and convincing as a group, with James Christensen's Marcello walking off with the acting laurels. Vocally his performance was also distinguished, though there was the occasional rough patch.

Thomas Edmond's Rodolfo was, as is to be expected, well sung, the voice well-focused and ringing and the phrasing sensitive. He also seemed less wooden than in the past, though there were still some lapses. Keith Hecimpton's philosopher and Roger Howell's Schvaneck were much more than the bland supporting figures they sometimes become: the roles were clearly delineated without relying on obvious mannerisms, the singing accurate and full of understanding.



Merle Richardson (Mimi) and Thomas Edmond (Rodolfo) in State Opera's *La Bohème*





Catherine Donald (*Muskrat*) and Marilyn Richardson (*Mimi*) in *Enter Opera's La Bohème*

The main problems were with the female roles — though "problem" is far too strong a word for Marilyn Richardson's *Mimi*. Ms Richardson is a marvellous performer in, for example *Jannet*, *Struwwelpeter* or *Wagner*: dramatically convincing and vocally stirring. I hope it doesn't sound ungracious, but I don't find her voice appropriate for *Mimi*. The sounds were searing, the notes all there, the musicianship beyond question; but the voice seems too wide, too gassy, too dramatic for the role. However, given this qualification, her reading of the part was dramatically persuasive — which is more than can be said for Catherine Donald's *Muskrat*, ineffectively sang and comically devoid of character.

Dennis Vaughan's reading of the room was accurate, though without much feeling for *Puccini's* idiom. Several phrases in the

chorus — the demands *Puccini* makes of them in Act 3 are severe. Most of them were met in this performance: the singing was energetic, accurate and very well-drilled. With Bill Hamland as chorus master the State Opera is well off indeed, and the chorus are sounding already more precise and musical than for some time.

## Carmen and Mikado in Brisbane

by Val Vailis

With a two-week season of *Carmen* alternating with *The Mikado* at Her Majesty's Brisbane, the Queensland Light Opera Company has been celebrating its twentieth birthday. Donald Smith, now resident here, was extremely lucky to sing

Don Jose to Suzanne Steele's Carmen. In the event, serious illness occurred and Gino Zanancaro stepped in at very short notice.

He hadn't been completely integrated into the production on opening night but acquitted himself well vocally. Suzanne Steele's Carmen was out of focus with the production as a whole. It was too Katharine Hepburn to do justice to the Mérimée-Bizet plot, nor did John Tucker's production catch the vitality of their conception.

There was an authentic tang to Georg Tapper's conducting of the Queensland Theatre Orchestra that found no equivalent even in the production of the tavern scene — although that and the apartment pass scene came nearest to the opera's requirements. It is strange that when listening to recordings of Supercin, Price, Berganza and Harne one is able to visualise the tension between the principals in the final confrontation, yet producers often seem unable to actualise it.

And at what social level are the cigarette girls to be cast? My first Carmen was a Tyrone Guthrie one in 1955, where it was cigarette-smoking blonde, faded black slacks, bare feet, and never a whiff of cigarette-smoke. Spain or a glimpse of high heels to mark the realisation of the action. The QLOOC chorus sings superbly and it deserved more visual production.

Over its twenty-year span the Queensland Light Opera has presented at least four different productions of *The Mikado*. David Macfarlane, the company's driving spirit, has been the chief "upholder and preserver" of the G&S tradition in this state. The present production, perhaps more ambitious for being the celebratory occasion, didn't have the sheer good spirit of his last *Perceval* and *Peepshow*. Perhaps being both producer and conductor took its toll as his pace with the orchestra was lacking the sprightliness it is capable of.

Dennis Olsen was the Ko-Ko. To make a comment in the *Canberra Times*, Olsen must be the noblest G&S performer of all time, and it is a little to be regretted that the star which his performance inhabits is so compounded of air and fire that the performances of such reliable as George Thorn, Ian Macdonald and Mark Pearson seemed earthy by comparison. And particularly in need of a personality was Brian Messner, the Nanki-Poo. From his printed past record I expected much more vocally, and had I been Yum Yum, I'd have gladly settled for Ko-Ko as a life companion rather than this particular wounding monster. The sad Ko-Ko got what he deserved — a comparably brilliant Katsuki in the person of Bev Shean, doing far and away the best she has ever done.

Max Huxley's original set, simple, stylish, were further enhanced by the poetic lighting of Anthony Everingham.

# GUIDE OPERA

## ACT

### PLAYHOUSE (46 7886)

Two of the Sorens by Benjamin Britten. A new production by Brian Bell, with designs by Peter Cooke. The second production of Britten's enigmatic work based on the Henry James novel that the Canberra Opera has presented in the last seven years. Aug 18, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 15.

## NSW

### THE AUSTRALIAN OPERA (3 6588)

Opera Theatre SDH, Alama by Handel, conducted by Richard Bonyngue with production by Sir Robert Helpmann. This rare opera series has Joan Garden in the title role of the stunning enchantress.

La Huguenera by Mayerbeer, another first for the Australian Opera — conducted by Richard Bonyngue, produced by LOTH Mansouri with design by John Stoddart and Michael Stannett. The opera is composed around events leading to the infamous massacre of St Bartholomew's Eve. Regoleto by Verdi, the well worn revival of John Cooper's production is now conducted by David Kram, design

by Michael Stannett and Allan Lees. Jerusa by Janacek, now in its eighth year of revival. John Cooper's splendid realisation of the Czech masterpiece with designs by Michael Stannett and Allan Lees is now conducted by Stuart Challender.



La Suora Angusta by Pizzoni, Norman Arlton's first production with the company since Laire will see Richard Bonyngue and David Kram alternate in the conducting for this opera based on Stephenson's Pamela or Virtue Rewarded with designs by Luciana Amighi. In repertory throughout August.

## QLD

### TOOWOOMBA ARTS THEATRE (30 1300)

The Pirates of Penzance by Gilbert and Sullivan, director Brian Crossley,

conductor, Peter Horne. To Aug 8.

## SA

### THE STATE OPERA (31 5161)

Carmen by Bizet, director, Tito Capobianco, conductor Dore Vaughan, designer, Hugh Colman, choreographer, Gigi Bando. Aug 6, 11, 13, 15, 16, 20, 22.

A first production with a state opera company for the distinguished Argentinian-born producer. His Carmen also heralds the return home of the socialised Australian mezzo Rachel Geller.

## WA

### HIS MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6388)

Opera Viva, Oklahoma, directed by Geoff Gibbs, musical director, John Hind, set by Bill Cowd, with James Bean, Caroline McKenzie and cast of 65. Aug 13-22.

### WA OPERA COMPANY

Touring, La Sorella Padrona by Pergolesi, musical director, Gerald Krug, directed by a special guest from overseas Jacobo Kaufmann. A comic one act opera plus favours and operetta highlights.

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# MUSIC

## Statistics of musical taste

by Fred Banks

A monthly report on live concert music in Sydney, which I hereby committed to your mercy, ought to begin by mapping the area with a brief case-wise one sentence, personal and informal.

Personal first. Each year I attend about 250 music events, most of them on the guest of a professional listener — a trade identification more widely recognised when put as "music critic". About two-thirds of these music events become the subject of reviews. Because it is essential for a durable entry to be able to refer to past events and to become aware of trends, and also because my interest in music is historical and sociological rather than technical, I have kept statistical data on all the live music which has disturbed by senses during the last 35 years or so. This information, maintained in both chronological and alphabetical form, is relevant stuff for thesis-writers and researchers wishing to chart the shifting taste of performers, promoters, planners and, above all, music consumers who pose as voluntary ticket buyers.

The musical picture revealed in this way shows to what extent we are willingly lettered to tradition. A list of 3,403 concerts in the end of last year, covering 26,214 performances of 14,214 different works by 1,981 composers, shows that the dozen most popular composers — if one accepts that frequency of performance reflects popularity — are, in order, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Beethoven, Brahms, Schumann, Chopin, Debussy, Bartók, Handel, Haydn and Tchaikovsky. The most frequently played Australian composers are Sculthorpe, Raymond Hanson, Arthur Benjamin, Malcolm Williamson and Richard Meale.

Only 24 of these 1,981 composers have appeared in programmes each and every year since 1947. Apart from the 12 already listed, they are (alphabetically) Britten, Dvorák, Lortz, Mendelssohn, Prokofiev, Ravel, Rossini, Saint-Saëns, R. Strauss, Stravinsky, Vaughan Williams and Wagner.

Let me spend a moment at one more statistical base camp before we move on to my actual mission. What are the most popular works of the repertoire? Here they are, in categories.

Symphonies: Brahms 4, Beethoven 1,

Concerto: Bach E Major violin, Beethoven Piano No 4, Grieg/Jarvis, Mozart Marriage of Figaro, Beethoven/Grover Miscellaneous Orchestral Works, Mozart Eine Kluge Nachbarschaft, Brahms St Anthony Passion, Opéra: Mozart Marriage of Figaro, Mozart Don Giovanni, Choral Works: Handel Messiah, Britten Ceremony of Carols, String Quartet: Schubert Op 29, Beethoven Op 18 No 6, Other Chamber-Music: Mozart Oboe Quartet, Hindemith Kleine Kammermusik, Duo Sonata: Beethoven violin/piano Op 18 No 1, Brahms violin/piano Op 104, Keyboard Sonatas: Beethoven Appassionata, Beethoven Waldstein Sonata, Schubert "Der Forelle", Brahms "Vergilisches Ständchen", Complex Song Cycle: Schumann "Frauenliebe und Leben", Madrigals: Dowland "Five Kravats For Lutes", Morley "Now in the Month Of Maying", Concert Pieces: Debussy Clair de Lune, Bartók Romanian Dances.

More information on request. Now to Sydney music in June.

Let us check first on how the top six composers fared.

Well, none of them did not fare at all. During June, I heard no music at all by Schubert, Brahms and Schumann. There may have been some, of course, in concerts I did not attend, while I went to 20 music events, that exhausted only me, not all the possibilities. Mozart was represented solely by the overture to *The Magic Flute* with which Harold Farberman, the American conductor making his first Australian tour for the ABC, began Sydney appearances which initially resorted to rather sluggish tempos in *Midas No 1* but gained confidence in Prokofiev No 5. Beethoven, also, was represented by a single work, the *Appassionata* sonata which surfaced with some rather flat contours in a generally promising student recital by pianist Ned Schmeider.

Bach was more conspicuous, entering three concerts. First came a fine and keyboard sonata in a high-lustre recital by flautist Jane Rutter, then the D Minor three harpsichord concerto clattering away in Old Darlington School with soloists Wynne Evans, Nicholas Parle and Christopher Wagstaff, and finally the BWV 964 Partita & Fugue in the Schmeider programme.

The relative prominence of the top six left appearances for many others.

A mass festival aired Agatha and Pan (for structured, artificial music on one hand, free spontaneity, folk-derived music on the other), occupied Sydney University over the Queen's Birthday weekend. It

covered a broad spectrum, from a Stravinsky song recital by soprano Susan Park and Cheryl McGinness, to a Polish evening of Baroque and Gluck, with Chopin masterpieces from Nicholas Routley as a bonus. In this festival and elsewhere, Australian music made a plentiful showing.

Among composers prominently featured were Peter Sculthorpe, Ross Edwards and — literally, because a Percussion Quartet allows plenty of scope for prominence, especially when played by the fine Synergy Ensemble — Colin Bright. The Sculthorpe works included *Acro Music 1* (we missed *II* because the necessary tape was melted), *Landscape II* and the evocative *Islands 1*, which was played at one of several entertaining programmes of the Seymour Group (directed by Anthony Frogg) by the accomplished violinist Spiros Ranton.

Ross Edwards was represented by Jackson, an inconspicuously sequenced but often appealing chamber-work, and *Musica 1* for solo cello. Other local composers whose names appeared included Robert Irving, Michael Smeles, John Carroll, Graham Powney (an attractive mad scientist at a recital by the Double Reed Society), Donald Haller with 12 highly emotional sonata for piano played by Dennis Henery, and James Pennington, whose short saxophone concerto had Peter Clench as virtuoso soloist with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in a round of subscription concerts under Farberman (for the other series, violinist Ruggiero Ricci played the second Bartók concerto with great assurance).

Finally, a few more stray notes here or less at students Niklaus Wynn, the young Swiss conductor working in America, vividly conducted an ABC youth concert devoted to works written by teenagers — a rare Bonn symphony of overture length and operatic mood, symphonies by Bart and Britten, and a set of early Chopin variations with Sonya Hardie as hard-working piano soloist. The New York Kammerensemble, consisting basically of two oboes, cor anglais and bassoon, gave smooth *Musica Viva* recital opportunities for very brief programmes of arrangements and rather inferior music, like as these musicians are, their reputation a simply misnomer. The California State University Choir from Long Beach presented a similar profile — an excellent body of performers, but abominable mistakes in their choice of music, a single vocal ranged from the Renaissance to amplified pop music.

# INFO DANCE

## WILDSTARS TO SYDNEY

After an on-again, off-again period, when backers and money seemed to be uncertain, the Australian Dance Theatre is now definitely to appear in Sydney in September with its Melbourne, Adelaide and Edinburgh success spectacular, *Wildstars*. They open on Friday September 24 at the Theatre Royal, and with a two-programme repertory season (acted on the end, play off) September 26.

## BACKSTAGE: AB INTO TV

The Australian Ballet will by now have finished shooting the pilot for a television series designed for children that they have commissioned the TV producers to make. *Wildard Kings* to make. Called *Shelazero*, it will feature AB artist David Burch and actress Olga Tchernia as co-hosts for the programme. They were unanimously chosen by a panel after watching dozens of audition tapes from Sydney and Melbourne.

The series plans to take children behind the scenes of a ballet company, into the workshops, the studios, it will deal with the elements which go to make up the dance.

Even training, makeup, costumes, choreography, music. There will be a main segment, children who are having a first lesson, more advanced ones and a letterbox segment for questions.

The Australian Ballet feels that while not everyone may want to be a professional dancer, everyone is potentially able to appreciate watching good dancing. They look on the programme as a stimulus for young audiences, to make them want to find out more, and whilst it is specifically designed for the young, its content is potentially of universal interest.

## QUEENSLAND BALLET SEMINAR

The Queensland Ballet recently held a two-week seminar, entitled Ballet Seminar '81, at its Brisbane studios. It had Ann Jenner leading a team of internationally experienced artists who held classes and seminars during the fortnight period.

The Theatre Board gave a special project grant to fund the classical ballet seminar in which the emphasis was on the qualities of performance — technique, style and

presentation. Other artists working at the Seminar included Kathleen Gordon, Kelvin Cox, Dair Baker and the Artistic Director of the Queensland Ballet, Hasek Callin.



*Ann Jenner*

## WA BALLET IN RESIDENCE

The Western Australian Ballet Company is in the middle of a two week period in residence in the Pilbara for the WA Arts Council. They will be running Paraburdoo, Tom Price and Dampier. Karratha where they'll be conducting evening and schools performances, open classes, keep-fit and jazz ballet classes. All the activities will be free, thanks to the generous sponsorship of Hamcray Iron.

# GUIDE DANCE

## ACT

**CANBERRA THEATRE (461 7666)**  
Carmen, Queensland Ballet's full length production. Aug 6-8

## NBW

**SYDNEY DANCE COMPANY (264 7988)**

Regent Theatre. *Poppy* by Greame Murphy. Murphy's full-length ballet about Jean Cocteau, revised since its first Sydney showing, to "all new, sensational New York version" Aug 13-28.

**DANCE CONNECTION (532 0555)**

Seymour Centre Downtown. *Ismaus*. No further details available.

## QLD

**HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (221 2777)**  
Australian Dance Theatre. *Ladyornith* choreographed by Christopher Bruce, *Paradigm* choreographed by Margaret

Wilson, *Fiddlersgibbet* choreographed by Johnathan Taylor. Part of ADT's national tour — unfortunately the technicalities of *Wildstars* prohibit its performance at Her Majesty's Aug 25-28.



*Sydney Dance Co's production of Poppy*

**QUEENSLAND BALLET COMPANY (226 3386)**

Touring. *Carmen* Aubrey — Aug 4, *Canberra* — Aug 6, 7, 8 (plus *Colonial Sketches* on Aug 7).

## SA

**FESTIVAL THEATRE (81 0121)**  
The Australian Ballet. *The Merry Widow* Aug 18-22.  
*The Three Musketeers* Aug 23-29.  
Two of the AB's full-length costume productions.

## VIC

**PALAS THEATRE, ST KILDA**  
The Australian Ballet. *Katerina*, *Afternoon of a Faun*, *Mardi Gras*, *German*. The first three are part of the AB's Programme 3 with *Afternoon of a Faun* a highlight as danced by guest artists Leonid and Valentina Kozlov. To Aug 8.

## WA

**HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE (321 6288)**  
The Australian Ballet. *The Three Musketeers* Aug 13, 14, 15. AB's popular costume ballet.

# A bite of the big apple

The success of the Sydney Dance Company's New York season has been widely recorded at home. Naturally, not everyone liked everything they did, but the majority opinion was wholehearted enthusiasm for the company and what it had to show.

Jill Sykes reports on how the Sydney Dance Company was "sold" to New Yorkers.

Being on the spot was an invigorating experience, a bit nerve-racking at first, but eventually a thrill to be

surrounded by a whole new community discovering the delights of the Sydney Dance Company. Some people, bored in on individual performances and works, others reacted to Graeme Murphy's theatrical flair and unchangeable style of choreography, Carl Vine's music and Kristian Fredriksson's designs.

Full credit is due to the performers on stage: their skill, daring and vitality seemed greater than ever under the impetus of dancing in New York. Even so, this could have gone unheeded if they had simply lobbed into town without the carefully orchestrated presentation which surrounded them.

Almost exactly a year beforehand,

the SDC's New York press agent, Tom Kerrigan, had been out to Australia to see the company. The expertise for its American debut was put together by the SDC's artistic director, Graeme Murphy, and his assistant, Janet Vernon, in discussion with Kerrigan — though not without some agonising over trans-Pacific differences.

Murphy and Vernon went to New York on the way back from their Italian tour at the end of last year expressly to meet and talk to the press and people involved in the tour. As the New York season approached, these local interviews appeared as well as magazine pieces commissioned from Australians such as John Cargher and



Kim Weller at Capitol. Photo: Benito Goto

myself. *The Wall Street Journal* dance critic, Peter Rosenwald, was also able to pry me from first-hand knowledge gained on visits to Australia.

"All the way from Australia," Kermigan's catchily advertising theme, had an intriguing sense of the astonishing about it. Though it wasn't until I started being questioned by New York dancers that I realised what a sound approach it was. "Were these dancers actually born in Australia?" asked one. "Where did they go to get their training?" and another, perplexed. We might as well have come from the moon.

To be fair, I should place these questions in the context of a New York dance audience, which tends to be fragmented into followers of particular companies or styles, and rarely looks outside its own city's varied offerings. New York seasons by America's regional companies always seem to be a source of amusement to those who attend: could there really be such talent beyond the boundaries of New York, New York?

So a company of dancers "all the way from Australia" had a novelty value all its own — especially since it wasn't spearheaded by an international star, as the Australian Ballet has been on its visits to America. Conversely, it was more of a challenge to sell.

Back in Sydney, a special photo session was called for the American tour. The results provided the basis of publicity shots which turned up around New York in the form of a much-prized poster of Kim Walker as Cupid on his skateboard, thousands of full-colour leaflets and a souvenir program. Itanco Garcia's photographs were another widely admired aspect of the American venture.

Advertisements appeared in the prime spots of *The New York Times* — an expensive exercise which seemed worth it to me for two reasons: not only to inform the public what was happening in the season, and when, but to indicate that the company meant business. There was a tough, professional feel about the season even before it began. The advance publicity left no one in any doubt that the SDC was unusual, that it couldn't be neatly classified with any familiar group. Indeed, the publicity material went out of its way to try and prevent such

assumptions, though it wasn't entirely successful. On the other hand, the comparisons were not uncomplimentary. Began, Jan Kylan, Martha Graham and Glen Tetley to name a few.

The three New York programs were carefully constructed by Murphy, Vornon and Kermigan to build up to the work that was expected to steal the season, *Poppa*. And it did. But even this was a delicate balancing act, as the SDC has so many facets that one evening could not contain all of them.

The result was a first-night program which remained true to the main advertising thrust — Cupid on a skateboard — and gave everyone plenty to talk about, whether they liked it or not. The controversial work was *Daphne and Chloé*, which was seen as an example of rampaging sex by some dance critics who obviously don't venture to the more outrageous corners of their own tiny island of Manhattan.

The most amusing expressions of dislike came from the reviewers of the *Daily News*: "the phiz-in-grope *Daphne and Chloé*", *New Yorker*, which described the same work as "a disastrous amalgam of high camp, low camp and summer camp", and *Women's Wear Daily* ("An Ameri-



Grace Murphy and Janet Vornon in the SDC. Dance Company's *Schemedance*.

can choreographing *Daphne and Chloé* would have had the idea of consuming the partner as a seductive motorcycle gang somewhere around 1958, and we could have forgotten it by 1959."

Sitting in the audience in a pocket of astonishment and disapprobation on opening night, I felt that *Daphne and Chloé* was a risk in the first performance. All the dance aficionados and critics had in the way of straightforward dance, to which they were more accustomed, were Murphy's *Pyridon* and Barry More-

land's *Dialogues*. But the strong foundation of advance information and enthusiasm showed us worth. Even those who didn't find the contents of the opening program to their taste came back for more. The second program of short works gave them all the "dancing" they desired, and the full evening of *Poppa* was the blockbuster everyone had hoped for.

This question of the amount of "dancing" in Grace Murphy's choreography has come up before. It was the stumbling block for Clive Barnes when he first saw the company in Australia (leaving him unimpressed, a reaction he completely withdrew in New York), and one which I can understand in the context of the classical ethic and flow which dominates New York dance in spring and early summer. Those of us in Australia who have watched Murphy's choreography develop are accustomed to his eclectic style and his tendency to concentrate on subtle details, theatrical concepts and elusive ideas rather than grand sweeps of pure dance that fill the stage, if not the mind. It is a big change to adjust to, and not necessarily every dancer's ideal. The fact that many people had a grasp of the Murphy approach by the time they saw *Poppa* may have contributed to its success in New York. But this two-act work is even better than it was when last seen in Australia, having been given a thorough revision for its American debut.

So many of the appreciative comments on the SDC have already been reprinted in Australia, I will add only those on the subject of *Poppa*, which will be seen in its new form here for the first time in a season at Sydney's Regent Theatre from August 13 to 29.

In his notice for the August edition of *Saturday Review*, which he generously allowed me to preview, Walter Terry says *Poppa* is "not only visually attractive and sometimes daring, but it is also a penetrating portrait of a unique artist." Francis Steegmuller, the American biographer of Cocteau, told Murphy that his book had come to life. And Anna Kisselgoff began her *New York Times* review: "Don't miss *Poppa*... Wayward, witty and highly theatrical, right down to an inevitable male nude scene, this stage biography of Jean Cocteau is an engrossing evening in the theatre."

## A national style emerges

by Bill Shoubridge

Here's an idea for the world's thinnest book: English, American and Australian people of letters write about the dance.

'S Frickin' once wrote a piece poking down balls in 'the most loquacious and cruel of the arts'. Shaw knew barely enough to insist the rigid specimens of it he had seen, and Germaine Greer was once moved to write that 'in a pas de deux, the ballerina, always looking on the arm of her man as just as his chest!'. She might also have written, with equal ignorance and a lot less pomposity, that he was her slave and constant support. All in all it's not a very good record. The French have a better one: Alfred de Musset, Gustave and Yvonne all wrote rish prose in praise of the most dynamic of the arts.

Australian Ballet Administrator, Peter Ruben recently went into print on a flyleaf programme denouncing Australian, and particularly Sydney, critics as destructive and uninformed. I think he wants to entice and writers who can be constructive and informed in the best interests of the Australian Ballet administration, if not its dancers.

Criticism of dance in Australia has a long way to go for the same reason that the art form itself has a long way to go, there's very little in the way of tradition and constantly reinforced experience. Many audiences, and so too the critics and (self-appointed) commentators, still wrangle in that almost past, period of literary review when the 'intellectuals' were annoyed with Australia for not being witty and beautiful in the way that Europe was witty and beautiful.

For a long time, critics have seen nothing more in the offerings than the presented than the dancers' proficiency and, when the time came the inexpressible (what a quaint cliché) of the choreographers. Very few of them have bothered to watch dancers closely, witness their develop and note the gradual rise of a national style in Australian dancers — by which I mean the individuality of the dancers and not the taste of their audience.

One hears so much rubbish spoken during ballet intervals, and so much gossip passing as information that one sometimes wonders if the forays made elsewhere in the world in the last 30 years and lately here in Australia have ever actually happened. But the truth is we are seeing a national national style being built up on our native dancers, and it is not easy built up on

superficialities.

Ballet dancing in Australia is no longer a savage discipline of a decadent European social society imposed on rustic and free-spirited Australian bodies (with all the apologies that went with it). What we're seeing now is a dancer well disciplined (most of the time), but not constrained. As Germaine Murphy mentioned in his interview in last month's issue, that is the style that he wants to engender within his own company and he does.

The fact that Janet Vernon is the ideal body for Murphy's choreographies purpose does not detract from what Nina Vandenbrouck or Susan Barling have to offer in terms of technical purity. It's just that the three of them project themselves and their technique in different ways. Barling always seems deformed, it's the flow of movement that we see first with her, then we notice the dancer that's projecting it. Whether it's because she prefers it that way or because she can't shake out as a personality first and a dancer second is only something she could tell you. Vandenbrouck on the other hand always makes you feel you're seeing a dancer having a great time whether she's suffering or exulting. The fact that sometimes she's out of phase somehow with other dancers is seen as secondary when you watch her, it's the energy and joy de vivre that gets you on.

Janet Vernon on the other hand — the closest thing the Sydney Dance Company has to a prima ballerina, as with Pamela

Backman of the Australian Dance Theatre — gives you the feeling she'd go backstage and scrounge herself if she was ever out of phase with anybody. Vernon and Backman are such perfectionists when it comes to outlying techniques that sometimes it gets in the way of what they are dancing. Watching them go through some of the conventions of Murphy's or Taylor's choreography with that intense focus that comes upon them is like watching a mathematician grappling with a problem of engineering.

A case in point is the pas de deux in the SDC's *Sheherazade*. When Vernon does an arabesque back, then folds through into arabesque forward I at least am fascinated by the fact that here's a physiological problem being worked out. Audiences love dance to look terribly difficult, and they want to rejoice with a dancer when she succeeds in making it look easy. Vernon and Backman know this and that's why their dancing has the algebraic symmetry it does. Vernon at times dances her part in *And Conversation* like a locomotive with a full head of steam and it's intimidating, but then she covers her cold spring with velvet when she does the Lykhanov in *Daphne and Chloris* and the strength is silky, the never, ever less than spring relax however.

Of late with the SDC, as now we almost no remnant in the performance of Sherez Repent, she is almost flawless. Put her in one of the big classical roles like Coppola or Baymoria and she dis-



Marilyn Kirkland with Gary Newman in the *ABA Suite on Dances*. Photo: Bruno Gatto

appears. She was propelled into principal status with the Australian Ballet before she was ready. She's always been a severe and trained dancer but there are occupations now when she just falls apart. That deep away in her back may help her to lift and define her shoulders and close her head in cross hair) won't against her in allegro work and then she blurs and spins.

Michelle Karkadee is about the only one at the moment who can successfully carry a major role right to the end of the evening. Her image is large and voluptuous, there's a full stretch in attitude and a clear line when she is being partnered, but how again is a dancer that needs the right sort of role.

I've watched Lynette Mann come up through the ranks gradually and she now has a lot more poise, assurance of style and command of body grammar than she did when she first danced a really stinky *Matrosvod* part three a few seasons ago. She is, or could be one of the best allegro dancers the AB has got when in character or comedy role, but the wiggly bawls below the chain of something like *Raymonda*.

She, and Doreen Pastorek have together a trait that I somehow think has filtered down to them from the days of Luciano Allosio, they both have a tendency to self-destruction first and the dancing second. It's not a laudable trait and one which I hope they'll loose with further experience.

Marilyn Rowe has always seemed the exact incarnation of the "Australian" dancer to me. She's not dancing in the moment and, with the problems of a new baby and widowhood on her hands, it is doubtful if she ever will again. This to me is tragic, because she hasn't yet fulfilled herself as a dancer and a wife and yet she loses lovely earnings as the first star she gave us.

Rowe was the only worthwhile thing in the *Sleeping Princess* production of a few years ago. She owned completely it as the role and yet it was substantially different from anything that I personally had seen from any European ballerina playing it. When Faany, or Chawer or Marie Park danced the part of Aurora, one was always aware of civility, of breeding and good form, of manners. Civility is something acquired with difficulty in Australian dancers, and that is only to be expected, but when Rowe danced Aurora one was irresistibly swept into the human drama and the fairy tale excitement. To see her in Act I in the birthday celebration was to witness a young, vibrant and beautiful girl, full of sexuality and spirit, struck cruelly down only to arise in the last Act, a severe and totally realized woman full of loss and relief.

It was that catastrophe, that spouseness of personality and body image that sin and doom define the female Australian

dancer. It's not the grandeur of the Russians, the stiffness of the English or the Olympic athleticism of the American dancer, it is a commonplace approach that has absorbed certain aspects of all of the above and distilled them into something that will with it be become unique, a sense of drama, of play and control.

It would be a pity if Marilyn Rowe, if she chooses no longer to dance, could not be brought in to personally coach some of the younger girls coming up through the AB major company or the Dancers leaving group, just as it would be a shame not to have some lasting effect from the presence of Valentina Kozlova within the company this year.

But the Australian Ballet has a lamentable record in capitalizing on the wealth of experience it has in its hall. I remember a case at point with the recent revival of Ballet's *Threshold*. No single member of the original cast (Alan Alder or Garth Welch) was asked to coach the new cast in the intricacies of their part, with the result that the work was a dismal flop. One also recalls the short change given to Anne Woodhouse when she came to replace Cynthia Chagor and Aurora and Juliet.

It is not enough for the AB to focus all their energies in a new production of a ballet or a film or a book at the end of every year and squeeze the rest of the repertoire in around it. As the record stands at the moment most of those blockbusters are no flimsy that they'll never last more than a few years, and the dancers in them are always left thrashing about in unfamiliar water.

A company style is not created through always introducing new costume dramas, it is created through the strength of tradition and through previous generations passing on their experience to others. If things go on as they are at the moment, the AB may do well at the box office (for such things are always beholden to the laws of diminishing returns) and yet still be bankrupt in terms of tradition and experience and acquired style.

## Gallery Dances

In the two or so years since I last saw the Kinetic Energy Dance Company they seem to have gone even further downhill. What they used to offer was a fairly wide cross section of dance pieces from a mass of choreographers. Now they seem content with the work of director Gwynne Jones, and so say it has little content. In its *Gallery Dances*, we are treated to what purport to be vignettes of people observed whilst observing in an Art Gallery.

Impressed with the twenty swags of his "character" there are what I take to be abstracts of of course paintings or



Kinetic Energy Dance Co's Gallery Dances

sculptures, "The Discus Thrower" or "Javelin" and so on. There may be a connecting theme, then as it is, but there is no connecting image apart from an strutting obscenity with the flexed foot which I have a fear is Jones' idea of Modernism.

The repetition and lack of breadth in the dancing as well as the choreography gives the whole evening a warmed over and pasty feeling.

As I've said before about the One Extra Dance Company (which apparently doesn't exist any more) and the Australian Contemporary Dance Company, the Kinetic people are going to have to rethink their whole point of view as to what they're going to present. At the moment they are offering the same kind of stuff that the bigger companies are giving us, and the bigger companies are giving it to us with more depth, art and ability.

*Gallery Dances* looked to me like something that the Ballet Rambert back in the early 60's might have dished up in a workshop performance, it given something distinctive. Unfortunately, despite all the allusions in the programme notes, the dancing was just a lot of posturing and rolling to illustrate moments of change and some piano steps (the Steve Reich "Music for a Large Ensemble" they used in the interval as background would have been far more worthy of treatment).

If they want to progress, their dancers are going to have to rethink their output and change direction and, although this may be getting personal, they really should change their name. A name like Kinetic Energy these days really is a bit passé. How about something like the Movement Union (as opposed to the Union Movement), it's fresh, different and intriguing, and if the company can match it with a vibrant direction in choreographic processes they will go a long way.



# BOOKS

## Personal detail and theatrical history

by John McCullum

*Not Without Dust and Heat: My Life in Theatre*, by Doris Fittero. Harper & Row, rrp \$19.95

John Hesperon tells how he found a guide book in North Africa which began "It is not easy to write a book. First you have to find a book. Then you have to write it." The simple truth of this should be a lesson to all those who have such, interesting or great lives — and then have to write books about them.

Doris Fittero's *Not Without Dust and Heat* joins the long line of Australian theatrical memoirs which reassemble through decades of increasing theatrical history without ever managing to give a coherent account of it all. Just as this genre is getting interesting theatrically, Miss Fittero suddenly takes us on a trip to Aden or Europe and we are plunged into the world of tourism. The names of the people she knows and/or loves roll on like a giant roller coaster but as an Independent Theatre Club Night. Like many such amateur memoirs the book is a strange mixture of personal detail and theatrical history.

As a personal account of a busy life in the theatre Miss Fittero's book is very interesting. Her privileged upbringing and apparently charmed life (if her memory or writing style, are not now deluding her) freed her from the personal attitudes ordinary people are prone to. She could afford to be firm but always gracious, in control but always generous and friendly. Everything or everyone in the book is first, talented, brilliant, lovely, dear, delightful or fascinating. When she has to stoop to review the sordid political matters that occasionally concerned even such a refined theatre as the Independent, a faint air of disdain creeps into her style — below it is quickly driven out (as in the novel) by another flurry of old friends.

This is the most frustrating thing about her book. Miss Fittero is very interesting writing about, for example, the formation of the Tron and the well-intentioned but misguided anglophobia of its founders. Hugh Hunt's rejection of Australian help (refusing an offer from John Alden on the grounds that he would do his own Shakespeare, thank you) and the gradual crowding out of companies like the

Independent by the new British imports (such as Hunt and Robert Quenton) make interesting reading. All too soon, however, we are back with the dear old friends. Miss Fittero misses an opportunity to drive her nationalist point home when she comments on the success of the Tron's tour of Judith Anderson in *Medea* in 1955. According to contemporary newspaper accounts the success of four plays toured was entirely paid for by the success of a new Australian play. *Summer of the Sirens* (see Book).

As an account of the 47 years during which the Independent dominated Sydney's amateur "art" theatre scene this book is disappointing. The theatre's "philosophy" — to present "the world's best plays well done" — was always rather vague. Its water-cooled, theatrical dogmatism was admirable during the lean years of the '30s to the '50s but towards the end it had begun to look to most Sydney theatregoers rather old hat. Apart from that goal Miss Fittero's main purpose seems to have been merely to keep the theatre open. Her mentor was Stanislavsky but what she took from him was his advice on the pragmatics of running a theatre

company rather than anything else.

The late decline was sad because the Independent's achievement was immense. Some 600 productions of plays which might not otherwise have been seen, scores of now well-known actors, directors and administrators, and generations of enthusiastic audiences. This was what the Independent gave to Australia.

My criticisms above, then, are made more in sorrow than in anger — also because the Independent guided (very firmly, as was its work) the first five years of my interest in theatre. The night I stayed up reading *Not Without Dust and Heat* I had an old solitary dream I used to have as a teenager acting there. I dreamt I was back in the lower dressing room, under the stage, it was opening night and I had forgotten to learn my lines. I woke up full of memories of the "Indy".

It took me years to shake off the Ind's influence. People are forever recounting the great and wonderful productions that first drew them into a passion for theatre. Doris Fittero and Peter Summerlee supplied mine, and I will always be grateful for that. Poor memories, perhaps, but my own.



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1982

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THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY MAY 11, 1981

## Ballet: Sydney Troupe's 'Poppy'

By MARJORIE KAPLAN

There's a "Poppy" which has had three incarnations: a 1915 short story by a Sydney-born Canadian, an 1939 novel by English novelist Noel Coward, and a 1959 French film. The Sydney Dance Company's new production of the ballet is a new incarnation of the story, set in the 1930s, and is a new production of the story, set in the 1930s, and is a new production of the story, set in the 1930s.

The story of "Poppy" is a tale of a young girl who is born in a poor family and is taken to a rich family where she is raised. She is a very beautiful girl and is very popular with the boys. She is a very beautiful girl and is very popular with the boys. She is a very beautiful girl and is very popular with the boys.

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NEW YORK POST  
On the Town

SATURDAY, MAY 30, 1981

## A 'Poppy' blooms at Center

The Sydney Dance Company's new production of "Poppy" is a new production of the story, set in the 1930s, and is a new production of the story, set in the 1930s, and is a new production of the story, set in the 1930s.

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